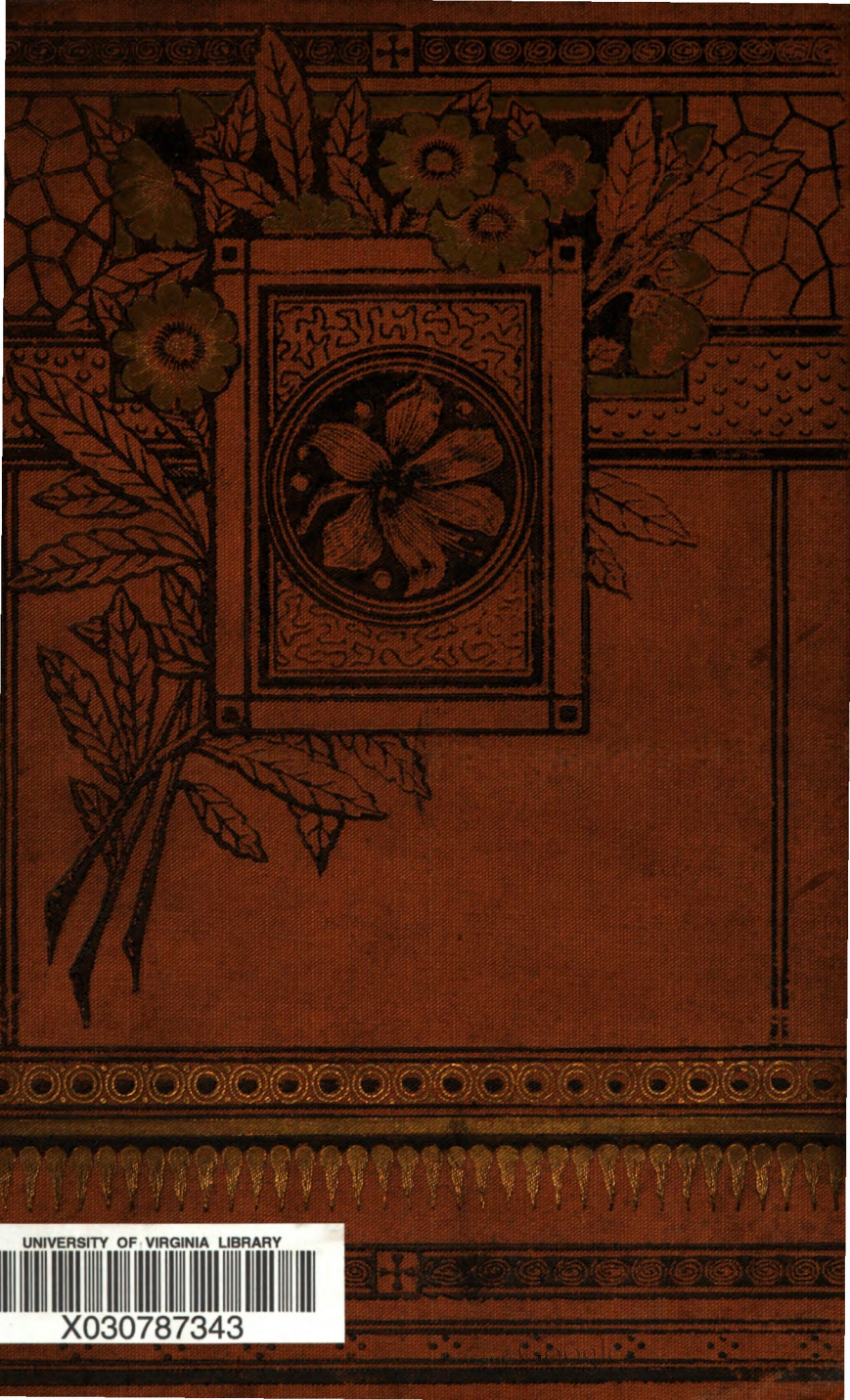

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E. F.

CARMELA

BY

Christian Reid

Author of "A Child of Mary," "Philip's Restitution," Etc.

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CARMELA.

CHAPTER I.

IT was a pretty picture. The sunny *patio*, open to the deep blue sky, its centre set with tropical plants in terra-cotta pots, green baskets hanging from the white arches that with their supporting columns had a classic grace, and opening all around rooms with shining tiled floors, frescoed ceilings, and softly tinted walls. A stranger entering would have uttered a cry of admiration and delight, especially if he possessed the artistic sense; but it was too familiar to be in the least remarkable to Carmela Lestrangle. Her dark eyes had first opened on the wonderful Mexican sky, which was now looking down in sapphire brightness upon her, and her whole life had been passed beneath it. She could imagine no other mode of life than that which surrounded her, and all its picturesque aspects were commonplace to her. The pretty court with the dazzling sunshine on its walls, its flow-

ers and arches and quaint, round, red well, Manuela singing in the kitchen, and Señora Echeveria passing to and fro in the loose and somewhat untidy *négligé* which characterizes Mexican women at home,—all had been before Carmela daily during the whole of her seventeen years.

And yet, although completely Mexican in birth and rearing, the girl was half a foreigner in blood. Something less than twenty years before, a young adventurer from the States, wandering down into the Southern land, which was at that time a *terra incognita* to his countrymen, had cast his fortunes there, embarked in business, and married a Mexican girl. Of this marriage Carmela was born; but her father had died before she could know his face, and she was hardly more than three years old when her mother was married again to one of her own people. Señor Echeveria was, however, as kind to the little Carmela as if she had been his own child, and this kindness did not lessen when other olive branches clustered around his board. The family was large, as most Mexican families are, consisting of five sturdy boys and a little brown-eyed girl; but nothing save the purer white of her complexion marked any difference between Carmela and the others. As time went on, it is doubtful if any one remembered the dead young stranger except

his daughter, who prayed faithfully for his soul, but who never thought of any link between herself and any other land than this familiar one.

So, as she sat in a shady corner of the *patio*, with her graceful young head bent over some sewing, she was altogether unaware that she shared in the picturesqueness of her surroundings. She was a slender young creature, a mere slip of maidenhood, but with many gracious promises of beauty, if fate were kind in allowing their fulfilment. A creamy white skin, delicate features, soft dark eyes set under perfect brows and shaded by sweeping lashes,—this description might answer for many faces in the Mexican land, but there was a charm of individuality about Carmela which set her beauty apart from that of others. All unconsciously to herself, there was something pathetic in the young face, which excited interest strangely. It did not arise from any sadness connected with her life, for that had been smooth and sunny, if uneventful; and her temper and disposition were remarkably sweet and amiable. It was rather a stamp which Nature sometimes sets upon those who are formed to feel too deeply ever to know much of what is called happiness by less susceptible people. There were depths of slumbering passion in this as yet scarcely awakened nature, possibi-

ties of aspiration, and chords ready to vibrate at the touch of emotion; while the sweet dark eyes had a questioning, wistful look in them, as if they were asking of life what life is seldom ready to give in answer to such appeals.

But if these things were true of Carmela, they were as yet true only in a limited sense. She was as profoundly unconscious of any hidden forces within herself as most of us are until life reveals us to ourselves, proving often our weakness, sometimes also our unsuspected strength. Existence flowed in a very placid course for her; and as she sat this day in the shady corner of the *patio*, exchanging a few words now and then with her mother, and braiding a little blouse for Alfredo, the youngest boy, she had not a thought which wandered beyond the narrow and peaceful limits of her life.

Yet it was on this day that the rousing touch—shall we say of fate or of Providence?—came.

There was a click of the iron gate that gave entrance to the *patio* from the street, and Señor Echeveria came in. He was a typical Mexican in appearance—of rather full habit, with an olive skin, and a face that expressed great kindness and amiability. He was smiling as he entered, and his dark eyes shone.

“Ah, Carmelita,” he exclaimed, on seeing his

stepdaughter, "I have a surprise for thee! I have made the acquaintance of a kinsman of thine."

"Of mine, papa?" said the girl, looking up with more surprise for the unusual form of the remark than for the fact so announced. It did not occur to her to think of any one who would be related to herself and not to the rest of her family. "It will be, perhaps, Teodoro Gomez," she added, remembering that a cousin of her mother's had long promised a visit to the city of Guadalajara, where the Echeverias lived.

"Ah, no!" replied the Señor, smiling still more, and shaking his head. "It is not Teodoro Gomez, but a young man from the states. He has the same name as thine, my Carmelita! That struck me. When he came into the bank with a draft, and I saw Lestrage on it, I thought at once of thy dead papa, and I questioned him. Soon I learned that he is thy cousin, though he had never heard of thee. But he knew of thy papa. And he will come—he has promised to come to see us."

"Whom do you speak of, Antonio?—who is it that will come?" asked Señora Echeveria, advancing from the rear of the *patio*.

As she sat down in one of the peculiarly Mexican chairs of cane and leather, she presented a very ample picture of matronly good looks. It

was a sweet face, though without much intellectual charm, on which time had laid no heavier touch than a superfluity of flesh that obscured its once delicate and graceful lines. But the soft gentleness of the dark eyes remained unchanged, the perfect pencilling of the brows, and the fine silkiness of the black, abundant hair.

Her husband looked at her, still smiling with good-natured satisfaction. "It is a cousin of our Carmelita," he said; "a young man from the States. His name is Lestrangle. It was because of that I knew him." And then the little story was told again.

Señora Echeveria listened, smiling also. It was like a dream to her, the brief episode of her marriage with the young English stranger, who had so long been dead; but to the kindly, simple nature any one with a claim upon Carmela or upon herself was very welcome. Full of curiosity and interest, she asked many questions; while Carmela sat listening silently, with a strange thrill at the thought of meeting one connected with the shadowy father she had never seen.

"But how will one talk to him, papa?" she asked presently, a little timidly; for, although she had taken lessons in English, she was conscious that her knowledge of the language, from

want of practice in speaking it, was very slight.

"He speaks Spanish," replied Señor Echeveria with an air of triumph, as if he had seen and anticipated this difficulty. "There will be no trouble. He has been in Old Spain. It seems that he has travelled much. No doubt he is a person of wealth and importance. I asked him why he came to Mexico; he said that it was for recreation only."

"Poor Enrique often said that his family in the Estados were rich," observed Señora Echeveria; "but if so it was not he who had any of the riches," she added, with a good-natured shrug of the shoulders. "When he died—ah, *Madra de Dios!*—Carmela and I would have been poor enough but for what I had from my father."

"It may be that his family knew nothing of his marriage," said Señor Echeveria, in kind excuse. "This young man had never heard of thee or of Carmela. He knew that his cousin was dead in Mexico—no more. When he comes he will tell thee all about thy relatives," the speaker added, with a nod to the young girl.

"And when will he come?" asked her mother.

"Ah, in an hour or two—when you will. I have promised to call for him at the hotel. I

thought it best to come and tell you first, that there might not be too much surprise."

"It is you who are always thoughtful, my Antonio," said his wife, affectionately; while Carmela could say nothing for thinking of the new experience which awaited her—the meeting a stranger and a foreigner, who was yet of her own blood.

Meanwhile, in another part of the city, the person thus discussed was delivering his own opinion upon the same subject; and this opinion differed somewhat from that of the kind-hearted Mexican who had hastened home to tell his wife and stepdaughter what had occurred.

Arthur Lestrangle did not hasten at all on his way from the bank, where he had gone to have his draft cashed, and where he had met Señor Echeveria. On the contrary, he proceeded very leisurely through the picturesque streets toward his hotel; and not even the many attractive sights surrounding him—the quaint, curious people, the wonderful bits of architecture, the dazzling sky and brilliant sunshine—could dispel a cloud of something like annoyance that had settled on his face. It was a refined face,—the face of a man of intellectual tastes and culture, perhaps also of artistic taste and talent; but with the drawback of a certain shrinking fastidiousness

and consequent irritability, which might make life a difficult thing for himself and those closely connected with him. Yet there could be no doubt of a charm which was also very real and very attractive, and which made those who knew him best ready to pardon the defects of temperament.

Let him loiter as he would, he found himself at length at the door of his hotel, and, passing up a flight of stone steps, reached a broad gallery, encircled by pillared arches, and surrounding a court where orange and banana trees were growing. Walking slowly around this, he knocked at one of many doors opening on it. "Come in!" said a voice in English; and he entered a large apartment, with a floor of glazed tiles, a French centre table, a cane-seated sofa and chairs, and in one corner a very small and very hard bed. On the sofa, wrapped in soft shawls, and at her back a down pillow which had come out of her own trunk, reclined a young lady whose face, although pretty and interesting, showed signs of habitual ill health. A strong resemblance between herself and the young man who entered made it sufficiently evident that they were brother and sister. She was writing with pencil on a tablet in her lap, and looked up as he quietly drew near, to remark :

"I am trying to put down my impressions of this charming place and this delightful climate, Arthur. They will be so glad to know at home that we have at last found exactly what we were in search of."

"It seems to be a nice sort of place," answered Lestrangle, in an unenthusiastic way; "and if the climate suits you, Miriam, we will certainly stay here. But I regret to say that I have learned since I went out of a slight—or it may prove *not* slight—drawback to the charm of our surroundings."

"What?" asked Miriam. "I shall be sorry if it is anything of importance."

"Would you consider a new and unknown relative of importance?"

The large blue eyes in the thin, pretty face opened wide. "A relative—of ours—*here!* Arthur, you are surely jesting."

"Not at all," replied Arthur, very seriously. "You have probably heard, although you have probably also forgotten, that we had a cousin who came to Mexico a good many years ago. When I was a child I used to hear speculations indulged in as to whether he would return with a silver mine in his pocket or without a penny. As it chanced, he never returned at all, but died here. I have met to-day a gentleman who married

his widow, and who tells me that he left a daughter."

"Did he marry a Mexican?"

"So it appears, and consequently no one at home ever heard of either wife or daughter. Queer kind of people, never to let the girl's relatives know that she was in existence! Yet the stepfather to-day was as pleased to meet me as if I had been a long-lost relative of his own. He almost embraced me when I confessed that Henry Lestrangle had been a cousin of mine, and gave me his card—here it is,—and made me promise to go to see my unknown connections."

"He must be a gentleman," said Miriam, drawing a conclusion from the bit of pasteboard in her hand.

"Oh, yes, a gentleman,—but not, I fancy, of the highest class," answered her brother, who had a remarkable instinct for these distinctions, and who had shrunk a little from Señor Echeveria's effusive cordiality. "I am afraid that it will be a great nuisance," he went on, after a short silence, with an irritated strain in his voice. "Meeting unknown relatives is always a nuisance. It is enough, generally speaking, to have to endure those one knows; but when they are foreigners, and when one is brought into contact in a familiar way with a life that is altogether strange, and

probably with a host of second-class people, then it becomes something more than a nuisance. If it were not for your health, I should propose that we leave on the next train."

"We have always that resource," said Miriam. "Nothing but our own wishes need detain us. We can leave at any time. But I do not see why we should run away from a shadow. The people may be very inoffensive—nay, they may really be pleasant, and able to show us a little of Mexican domestic life. I confess I should like that. Don't fall into one of your fits of disgust, Arthur, before you know whether or not there is anything to be disgusted about."

"I am glad you look at it so philosophically," observed Lestrangle, who had really been more annoyed on her account than on his own. "I thought you would be as much averse to the idea as I feel myself. And it seemed hard that we should be driven away from a place that promises to suit you."

"We will certainly not be driven away until we know what we are retreating from," said Miriam. "I feel some curiosity about this unknown cousin. We Lestranges do not fancy ourselves to be quite ordinary. I wonder what result has been produced by the combination of Lestrangle talent and the peculiar character of

these half Spanish, half Indian people. I am astonished at you, Arthur, that you do not feel any interest in learning what the girl may be."

"She will be an unformed and unintellectual Mexican woman ; what else is possible?" said Arthur. "One has only to look at the faces of the vast majority of these women to see what they are—creatures of narrow limits in every way. I feel no curiosity or interest whatever about her ; but if we stay here, I suppose I must fulfil my promise of seeing the people."

"Oh, by all means ! And, unless they are absolutely impossible, I must see them too. Try and look at the matter more cheerfully. This may really prove, after all, a pleasant episode in our Mexican experience."

Arthur lifted his shoulders with an air of incredulity. "It will be a nuisance and a bore," he said, emphatically. "Do not expect anything else."

CHAPTER II.

BUT perhaps, in his own mind, Mr. Lestrangle was convicted of rash judgment when, having a little later accompanied Señor Echeveria to his house, he entered upon the pretty, picturesque interior, which charmed the artistic sense, always keenly alive with him, and very susceptible to outward impressions. It was not the stately house of a wealthy man, but it was the house of a man in comfortable circumstances, and was particularly bright and graceful in appearance and decoration. Opening on the court, with its blooming plants, its columned arches and hanging baskets, was the *sala*—a lofty apartment with ceiling and walls frescoed in soft distemper colors, and floor of shining tiles. There was a square of carpet at the end, where a sofa and two rows of large chairs facing each other were placed in Spanish fashion for purposes of conversation ; lace draperies hung at the windows ; there were some tall, handsome vases in the corners, and an air of good taste pervading the whole, which was an agreeable surprise and reassurance to the young man, whose eyes took in the effect at a glance.

He was not so much impressed by Señora Echeveria, who came in after a moment and welcomed him most cordially. Her amplitude of size, her looseness of attire prejudiced him ; and, not knowing the habits of the country, he fancied her more *bourgeois* than she was. But under the flesh with which time had overlaid it he saw unmistakable signs of the beauty that had distinguished her in her youth, and felt less surprise at the marriage of his dead cousin. "It is not likely that he was a man who looked for any intellectual charm in a woman," he thought ; "and there must have been a great deal of physical charm here. It is to be hoped that her daughter has inherited it. She will at least be worth looking at in that case."

As if to answer this somewhat supercilious reflection, Carmela at this instant entered the room. And no sooner had he seen her than Mr. Lestrangle decided that she was very well worth looking at. Slight, delicate, shrinking as she was in appearance, and with no "presence" at all, he recognized at once her unusual beauty. The exquisite moulding of her features, the fine lines of her brow, the statue-like setting of her full, dark eyes, and the clear tints that mingled in her soft, ivory complexion, fascinated his gaze. Within the space of two minutes he had seen that grace-

ful head carved in marble, and painted with delicate skill against a background of such deep yet luminous color as the Spanish painters employed. "She has the most refined type of loveliness that I have seen even among a people remarkable for personal beauty," he thought. "What a study she will make!"

It was characteristic of the man that the effect of this beauty was at once perceptible in the increased interest and respect of his manner. It was the homage he unconsciously paid to the charm of the girl, whose whole appearance expressed something deeper and higher than her personal loveliness. He forgot his reserve, his fastidiousness, his intention to be very guarded in manner towards these people, and give them no excuse for the familiarity he dreaded. Perhaps he began to understand that there was no familiarity to be dreaded, only a kindness and a courtesy that shamed the reserve in which he had intrenched himself.

"And so I have the honor to be the first of your foreign relations whom you have seen, *señorita*?" he said, addressing himself to Carmela in fluent Spanish. "You must allow me, then, to express for them collectively my pleasure in discovering you, and my regret that we had not known of your existence sooner."

"You are very good, Señor," replied the girl, with downcast lids. "It is a pleasure to me to meet at last some one of the family of my father."

"Perhaps, then, you will not be sorry to know that you are to make the acquaintance of two of us," said Mr. Lestrangle. "My sister is with me, and hopes that you will come to see her. She is an invalid,—at least her health is not good; and we have come to Mexico trusting that the climate may benefit her."

"Ah, she is ill?" observed Señora Echeveria, sympathetically. "We will go to see her at once. To be ill in a foreign country—that is very sad."

"You will not find her absolutely ill," said Lestrangle; "but her health has been delicate for a long time, and she cannot bear a cold climate. Consequently when winter comes we start, like the birds, for the South. In this way we have travelled much. Last winter we spent in Spain, and this winter we thought we would see what New Spain has to offer."

"You like it, I hope—our country?" asked Señor Echeveria.

"I like it much more than I expected," the young man answered. "The Old and New Worlds are combined here in the most delightfully picturesque manner. Wherever the Spaniard has

touched, there is a romance and a charm to be found nowhere else; and in Mexico you possess in addition to this the most perfect of climates, and a country that in beauty, I dare say, leaves nothing to be desired."

He was rewarded for this little tribute by a glance from Carmela's dark eyes, while Señora Echeveria smiled graciously, and her husband thanked him for doing justice to a country which its people felt to be little known and less appreciated.

"Oh, yes, we have been in the city of Mexico," Mr. Lestrangle went on, in answer to questions that were full of interest; "but we found it cold there—at least Miriam did—so we have come here in search of a warmer climate."

"It *is* cold in Mexico at this season," said Señor Echeveria, with the air of one who makes a large admission. "But here—no. The señorita, your sister, does not find it cold here?"

"Well, she shivers a little in the mornings and evenings," answered the young man, smiling; "but your sunshine makes amends for everything. Every day we wander out for two or three hours, and bask in it, while we admire the wonderful fronts of your old churches. They are marvels of picturesqueness. This one just across the way from you now—what is it?"

"Santa Monica, Señor," answered Carmela, on whom his eye rested as he asked the question.

"A day or two ago I stood for an hour admiring its wonderful sculptured portals. Perhaps"—as he caught a flitting smile on her lips—"you saw me?"

"Yes," she replied; "as I came out of the church I saw you, and knew that you were a stranger; for while our people love our old churches, they do not think of admiring them."

"Of course familiarity with a thing lessens the perception of its beauty,—or at least is very likely to have that effect," said Mr. Lestrangle, somewhat condescendingly; "but your churches are delightful to an artist's eye—that is, without. Within, although imposing, many details mar their beauty."

"You are perhaps—Protestant?" said Señora Echeveria, hesitatingly.

The young man shrugged his shoulders slightly. "My people are Protestant," he replied, "but for myself I am a *protestant* only in so far that I protest against all fetters on liberty. I admire the ancient Church far more than the crude and narrow sects that have replaced it with the majority of the Anglo-Saxon people. It has the beauty of antiquity, of art, of poetry. If I wor-

shipped at any Christian shrine, I should undoubtedly be a Catholic."

"But as it is, you are a liberal—what we call a freethinker?" said Señor Echeveria, doubtfully. He had an extended knowledge of freethinkers, and the knowledge inclined him to scant respect for them. Like all Mexicans who are faithful to religion, he had suffered much persecution at their hands, and had witnessed the despotic tyranny which they practise in the name of freedom.

"I am a liberal in the sense of wishing every man to practise what form of religion pleases him best, and in disliking all attempts to restrain his liberty," replied Lestrangle. "It is as much a violation of liberty to forbid a man to be a monk, if the fancy pleases him, as it would be to force him to be a monk if it did *not* please him."

"It is a pity that you cannot preach such liberal doctrine as that to our Government," observed Señor Echeveria, dryly. "Those who compose it also talk much of liberty, but it is liberty for only one class. Well, perhaps a better day will come, and at least we now have peace. That is why our people submit to much; they are weary of strife, and desire peace."

"But it is buying peace too dearly to submit to oppression in order to obtain it," said the young man, quickly.

"You have not lived in Mexico, señor," answered the Mexican, gravely. "If so, you might think differently. Owing to continual war, our country has been ruined, our credit destroyed, and our people slain by wholesale, until it is wonderful that any Mexicans remain. We bear spoliation and oppression rather than take the responsibility of renewing these horrors."

"For that one can hardly blame you," said Lestrangle,—although in his heart he had blamed them, and with presumptuous contempt called them cowards for submitting to the tyranny of a Government as autocratic as that of Russia."

Presently he rose to take leave, and, turning to Carmela, said: "My sister hopes that we shall see much of you while we are here, my cousin. And I hope so also. You will be interested in hearing of the family and country of your father."

"Much, señor," replied the girl, with evident sincerity. "It will interest me greatly to hear all that you can tell me. I have often thought that I should like to know something of his country and those who were related to him."

"I assure you that those related to him will be very glad to know of *you*," said the young man with a cordiality entirely without effort.

After he left the house, followed to the threshold by hospitable invitations to return, he smiled at the thought of the rapid change that had taken place in his sentiments since he entered. Surely an anticipated annoyance had never turned more quickly into a source of interest and pleasure. When he walked into his sister's presence, the expression of his countenance at once indicated the changed aspect of affairs.

"Well," she said, smiling, "I perceive that things have not proved so bad, after all. The new cousin is not altogether as impossible as you imagined she might be."

"She is exceedingly beautiful," he said; "and, more than that, she promises to be interesting. Fancy a girl with the face of a Madonna and the eyes of a sibyl, perfectly unformed and undeveloped! Can you not conceive that there are possibilities of remarkable interest there?"

"I think that there must be possibilities of *very* remarkable interest," she replied, "for you to even observe a girl who is perfectly unformed and undeveloped."

"I am certainly not partial to crudity in general, but there is really nothing crude here,—only possibilities as dormant as the color and fragrance of the rose when folded in its green-sheathed bud. She has an exquisite face—lines

and tints that one longs to paint, and capabilities of expression such as I have hardly ever seen before."

"You make me curious to see her."

"When you see her you will find that I have not exaggerated in the least. Do not, however, expect anything developed. She is at present simply a shy, shrinking girl, who scarcely speaks. But, unless I am mistaken, the process of development when she is brought into contact with us will be very rapid. And it will be an interesting study to watch it."

Miss Lestrangle looked at her brother a moment before she replied. Then she said: "I know you are partial to such studies, but you must remember that sometimes there is danger in them."

"To me?" he asked, lifting his eyebrows with a slightly amused smile.

"No, certainly not to you," she answered. "As I have often told you, there are points of resemblance between yourself and some of Mallock's heroes. You have amused yourself so long with certain emotions, that you could not if you would fall honestly in love. But an unformed, undeveloped girl might do so—not understanding the nature of your interest in her. I want you to remember this."

The smile faded from the young man's lips ; his brow contracted into a quick, irritable frown.

"You ought to know," he said, "that there is nothing I dislike more than such essentially vulgar and commonplace suggestions as these. A vulgar and commonplace person might be excused for making them, but *you*, I think, should know better."

"I know," she replied, "that human nature is rarely sublimated beyond these possibilities ; and certainly one would not expect that to be the case with a girl such as you describe.

"You have not understood my description if you do not realize that the only source of my interest in this girl is that I believe her to be *not* commonplace, *not* ready to prove herself a silly, sentimental creature like the average school-girl—but even the discussion of such a suggestion disgusts one, and lowers the subject of it. I am astonished at you, Miriam,—really astonished ! You have almost spoiled my pleasure in the thought of watching the development of this nature, and such an interest is certainly an unexpected good fortune *here*."

Miriam sighed and smiled together. "You think only of yourself, Arthur," she said ; "but I was trying to make you think of another. Well,

when I see the girl, I can judge better—by the bye, what is her name?”

“Carmela. It is pretty, is it not?”

“Yes, but with a suggestion of sadness. One thinks of a Carmelite nun. Do you remember when Alice Yelverton joined that order, how much we heard of the terrible austerity and gloom of the life she entered upon? It really made one shudder.”

“There is no suggestion of austerity and gloom about Carmela. She looks more like a muse than a nun. They should call her Carmen, sweetest of Spanish names.”

“I hope that she will soon come to see me,” said Miss Lestrangle. “I, too, am very much in need of an interest.”

CHAPTER III.

IT was not long before Carmela came ; the next day her mother and herself called in state on Miss Lestrangle, and the latter was enabled to judge of the accuracy of her brother's description. Knowing his fastidious taste and artistic perceptions, she had very little idea of finding him mistaken ; but not even his unusually enthusiastic words had prepared her for the exquisite face of the young girl,—so picturesque and delicate, with its shadowy eyes full of unconscious pathos, and tender, softly-smiling lips.

“I could do nothing but look at her,” she said afterward. “It was like a head transformed to breathing life from the canvas of some beautiful old painting. She must have thought me very rude for staring so.”

Carmela, however, had seen no rudeness in the mild blue eyes that turned constantly to her face. On the contrary, her heart had warmed toward their owner, feeling the cordial kindness in the gaze. Whether it was kindred blood or sympathy of nature between these two, the fact remained that they understood each other from the

first ; and when Miriam said, " You will come to see me often. Remember I am an invalid, with little to amuse me," the Mexican girl looked with wistful entreaty toward her mother.

" Yes, she shall come," observed Señora Echeveria ; " and you will come to see us also. Our home is yours. I had not expected that Carmela would ever know any of her father's family, but it is well that she should do so. She shall come whenever you wish for her."

" That will be very often," said Miss Lestrangle, holding out her hand to the young girl. " And tell me, Señora, if your Mexican customs will allow that she should go about with us a little ? Am I chaperon enough ?"

" You mean in public ?" asked the señora, doubtfully.

" Yes : to help us in our sight-seeing, to go with us on little excursions, to show us the beautiful old churches of your city, and other objects of interest."

" I see no harm in that," answered the señora, after a moment's reflection. " It is not exactly according to our custom ; but you are relatives—there can be no serious objection. Yes, if you wish it, she may go with you."

" Thank you !" said Miss Lestrangle, gratefully. " It will make our excursions very different, to

have some one who can tell us the things we always want to know. And I will take good care of her, I promise you that."

The señora replied that she was very sure of it, and then the two ladies took their departure, promising that Carmela should return the following day.

The next day she made her appearance punctually, wearing over her graceful head the black drapery of a Mexican lady, instead of the hat in which she had made her ceremonious visit of the day before.

"I fear that I am a little late," she said ; "but you will excuse me. It is a great feast to-day, and I went to the High Mass at the Cathedral. I thought that perhaps you would be there also."

"We are not Catholics, you know," answered Miss Lestrangle ; "and I was not aware that it was a feast to-day, else I might have gone—for the music. You have very fine music in your Cathedral."

"It is the Purísima Concepción," said Carmela, with a surprise that she could not restrain in her dark eyes. "Is it possible that Protestants do not recognize that ?"

"I suppose you mean what is called in English the Immaculate Conception ?" replied Miriam. "We do not observe it ; it is a Roman feast alto-

gether. In fact, you must not be shocked if I say that I do not believe in that which it celebrates."

"Not believe—" For a moment Carmela could not finish her sentence. Then she said a little timidly, as one who fears to sound an unknown depth: "You cannot mean that you believe there was any stain of sin in the Mother of God?"

"Why not?" asked Miss Lestrangle, although the form of the question made her feel somewhat doubtful. "Why should she have been exempted?"

"Why, for the honor of the Lord!" answered Carmela, using unconsciously the words of a great saint. "If He was God—and you believe *that*, do you not?"

"Oh, yes!" with a slight smile; "I believe that as fully as you do."

"Then He surely had power to exempt His Mother from the power of the devil; and it would have been very strange—do you not think?—if he had not done so."

"I suppose so," assented the other, who found herself quite unable to answer this simple argument. Then with sudden recollection, she added: "But we must not discuss these things, or your mother will be afraid to let you come to see

me. Besides, I admire your faith very much, and I would not for the world suggest anything that might unsettle it."

Carmela might have been forgiven if she had smiled, but she was too well-bred for that. She only remarked, quietly, "That would be impossible," as she rose to shake hands with Arthur, who entered at the moment.

"How charmed I am to find you here!" he said—and he looked what he expressed. "It is a great pleasure to my sister to have a companion, and she tells me that you are going to be kind enough to accompany us in some of our wanderings about your beautiful old city. By the bye, everything seems *en fête* to a tremendous degree to-day. Bells are clashing from every steeple, and draperies are floating from windows and balconies. Pray what is going on?"

"It is the Feast of the Immaculate Conception," answered his sister. "Carmela was just telling me of it before you came in."

"Ah!" said he. "That accounts for the blue and white colors everywhere, and for so many copies of Murillo's 'Immaculate Conception' displayed here and there. It is indeed a wonderful sight—a whole city decorated in festal attire to celebrate an abstract dogma of faith. I never saw anything quite like it."

"And did you not see the illumination last night?" asked Carmela. "It was beautiful, especially that of the Cathedral."

"No. I am sorry to say that we did not go out last night. We received a package of books and papers from home, and devoted our evening to them,—not knowing that there was anything special going on. Of course we heard a great many bells, but that was not sufficiently remarkable to excite inquiry."

"If you like the decorations to-day, you would have been pleased with the illumination," said Carmela. "But you can see it to-night."

"And meanwhile I want to go out and look at the streets," said the young man, addressing his sister. "Put on your hat while I order a carriage. You will come with us?" he asked, turning to Carmela.

"Of course," replied Miriam. "She has promised to be our *cicerone*, and show us what is best worth seeing."

Carmela acquiescing with a smile, the carriage was ordered, and the three were soon driving through a city that had indeed decked itself in festal guise to honor the stainless purity of the Mother of God. Everywhere her colors appeared. White draperies of lace or muslin hung from the outside of windows and balconies, tied by ribbons

blue as the sapphire sky above; and here and there, framed in flowers, appeared the well-known picture of the slender virgin form upborne upon the crescent moon. Street after street was decorated in this manner,—a touching and wonderful sight, the spontaneous homage of a whole people. The poetry of it struck the “liberal” young strangers, who had no idea of the depths of divine truth involved in this doctrine of Our Lady’s immaculate purity.

“What faith it all shows, and what love!” said Lestrangle. “To think that they fling out their banners, and dress their houses with lace and flowers by day and lamps by night, simply to show their rejoicing that the Mother of God was preserved free from original sin!”

“But she is our Mother, too,” remarked Carmela. “That is why we rejoice. She is the Second Eve—the mother of the race to whom heaven was opened by her Divine Son. When we think of all that this privilege of hers means for us, is it strange that we should show her all the honor in our power?”

“From that point of view—no, it is not,” answered Miriam, reflectively. “I am afraid that we seldom think of her part in the great drama of Redemption.”

“I have always thought that the cult of the

Virgin is one of the most beautiful, poetical and really elevating things in the Christian religion," observed Lestrangle. "Protestants made a great mistake in discarding it."

His sister gave him a slight, satirical glance, but, on account of Carmela's presence, restrained the words trembling on her lips. "It is not necessary to let this child know that he has no faith at all," she thought.

A moment later their carriage drove around a garden where blooming flowers filled the air with fragrance, and approached the front of a noble old church of brown stone, elaborately and quaintly carved, and with the open belfries that give such an eminently picturesque effect.

"This is our Santuario," said Carmela. "I suppose you have seen it before?"

"Oh yes, we have admired it often," answered Lestrangle; "and I have sketched it from the garden opposite. It is a magnificent old pile. In form and color it leaves nothing to be desired. But why is it called the Santuario?"

"Because it is the Church of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe. You have been to our great shrine near Mexico, no doubt?"

"Certainly. We went there and were vastly interested. And this is the Church of Guadalupe here? Ah, I understand now!"

"Within a few days our great national *fiesta* of Guadalupe will be celebrated," said Carmela. "That will perhaps interest you. The city will be decorated then more handsomely than to-day. This is the feast of the whole Church, but that is our own specially."

"You must forgive my ignorance," observed Lestrangle; "but why should it be your own specially?"

The girl looked at him with surprise. How could people whom she had regarded as marvels of education and culture be so ignorant?

"Because," she answered, simply, "the Blessed Virgin, in revealing herself to the poor Indian, Juan Diego, proved her adoption of the whole Mexican people as her children. So we try to show our love and gratitude on the feast of Guadalupe, which is a Mexican feast alone."

"And this church will be the headquarters of its celebration, I suppose?"

"Yes. When the *fiesta* is at its height, it will be crowded so that it will be difficult even to approach it."

"Then let us go in now," said Miriam.

And so they found themselves, a few minutes later, in the solemn old sanctuary. The Masses of the day were over, but an odor of incense still pervaded the interior, and many kneeling forms

were scattered through the long nave—empty of seats, like all Mexican churches, and leading the eye at once to the dim magnificence of the high altar, over which, surrounded by hangings of rich crimson velvet, was suspended an admirable copy of the miraculous picture of Guadalupe.

Those who expect to find this wonderful picture (which is impressed upon an Indian blanket, by what vehicle the most skeptical have never been able to discover or declare,) rude in design or execution, will be astonished by its grace, tenderness and dignity. There are indeed few representations of the Virgin of Nazareth and Queen of Heaven which surpass it in these respects. Clothed in a sun-like garment and wrapped in a mantle embroidered with stars, the majestic yet benignant figure stands upon the crescent moon—the Woman of the Apostle's inspired vision, yet the tender Mother of the faithful, as the bending face implies; while in exquisite pose, the hands are clasped, as if in prayer, upon the breast. Even those who have no belief in the gracious miracle which wrought the picture can hardly look upon it unmoved, so compelling is the charm of its blended sweetness and majesty; while no one can wonder at the ecstatic love with which the Mexicans gaze at the image of her who so appeared to one of the poorest of their race, and impressed

her radiant likeness upon his blanket, as a marvel and token for all generations.

“What an exquisite legend it is!” thought Le-strange, letting his gaze wander from the picture—with which he was familiar, and which he had often admired—to the paintings around it representing the story. “Some day I will make a picture of that scene on the mountain. Treated artistically, it would be very fine. Or perhaps it would be better to paint a scene in some of these churches; a rich old altar like this, the picture above, and a group on the pavement below—a peon with arms outstretched in supplication, a poor old woman telling her beads, and a young, beautiful girl kneeling in soft shadow, with one ray of misty sunshine falling over her from one of the high windows of the dome.”

It was a coincidence that just such a ray was falling over Carmela, as she knelt with upturned face and lips softly moving in prayer. “If I could only catch that expression!” thought the young man; and then, some feeling of propriety coming to him, he turned his gaze away from her to the old church in which he stood, where all things were mellow with the touch of age, full of dim richness and infinite picturesqueness.

“Except in Spain, I have never seen anything to equal these Mexican churches,” he said, as they

presently emerged into the dazzling sunshine—how dazzling after the soft gloom of the old sanctuary!—the balmy air and fragrance wafted from the garden opposite. “I want to paint a scene in that church. If I succeed, will you let me put *you* into it?” he asked suddenly, addressing Carmela.

She looked a little startled. “But how?” she asked. It did not occur to her that she could readily form a part of the Santuario.

“Oh, I would like to introduce one or two people! It would be more natural. And you certainly cannot object to figuring in such an irreproachable place.”

“Are you, then, a painter?” she inquired.

“In an amateur way,” he answered; “which means that I am not much of one, but I like art exceedingly.”

“It means that he could be a very fine painter—everyone says so—if he had a stimulus to work,” observed Miss Lestrangle. “If he had to paint pictures to sell he would soon make a reputation.”

“That I deny,” observed the young man. “Under those circumstances, I might paint ‘pot-boilers,’ but I certainly would not produce fine pictures; no man can do his best when he works under sordid compulsion.”

"Yet the best work of the world has been produced in that manner."

"I doubt it. The men of whom you speak could have done much better had leisure for careful work been allowed them."

Miriam shrugged her shoulders. "We have often discussed that question," she said, "and never agreed. I should like to see you put to the test. If Aunt Elinor found another heir, you might become an artist."

Mr. Lestrangle colored in a manner which plainly indicated that he was not pleased. "If I am an artist," he said, stiffly, "an accident like that of which you speak could neither make nor mar me. But this is very irrelevant. What interests me at present is whether Carmela will allow me to put her into my picture of the Santuario."

"I shall be very much honored," remarked Carmela,—Spanish courtesy and the association with the revered shrine banishing any doubt she might else have entertained with regard to the proposal.

"It will be a very fine subject," said Miss Lestrangle, looking back at the noble old building. Then, as her glance fell on Carmela, she smiled. "The question is," she added, "will it be a picture of the Santuario or of Carmela?"

CHAPTER IV.

BUT if the decorations of the day, in honor of the Immaculate Conception, had impressed the two strangers, how was it at night, when the whole city flashed with light from end to end in token of rejoicing? The splendid façade of the Cathedral was outlined in fire, displaying its beautiful architecture in an unequalled manner, and throwing into broad relief the sculptured "Assumption" above the great central portal; while all the lines of the Sagrario* flashed with flame, and its dome was encircled by a glittering diadem of light. This superb mass of buildings, with its noble proportions traced in glittering splendor against the purple sky, would alone have made a memorable picture; but it was only the central point from which the illumination spread in radiating vistas. In one direction the stately old tower of San Francisco—one of the most picturesque landmarks of Guadalajara—wore a double crown of fire, while in another the beautiful open

*The chief parish church, which in Mexican cities is always placed immediately beside the cathedral.

belfries of the Santuario were traced in living flame against the sky. And as the churches lifted their towers and spires of light toward heaven, all down the long streets the people vied with one another in decorating their houses with colored lanterns; while here and there windows were thrown open to display some improvised lace draped altar, where Mary's statue stood, surrounded by candles and flowers.

Never, in all their wanderings, had the Le-stranges seen such a magnificent act of faith on the part of the whole city. Despite prejudice and despite ignorance, the significance of it impressed them even more deeply than the beauty. Every point of flame seemed a tongue of praise, and all the long lines of fire declared the unequalled honor of Her whom all generations shall call blessed.

It was while they were walking around the Cathedral, admiring from every point of view its gorgeous illumination, that they met the Echeveria party, consisting of Carmela and her parents.

"Ah," said Señora Echeveria, cheerfully, "it is you whom we are in search of! We were coming to take you out to see our illumination, since Carmela says that you did not see it last night."

"We are making amends to-night for that stu-

pidity," replied Lestrangle. "We have been walking and admiring for the last hour. I am afraid I have completely tired Miriam."

"I have not thought of it before," said Miriam, "but I believe I *am* a little tired, so we will rest for a short time before seeing more. The hotel is near by—you will come to our rooms?" she asked, addressing the Echeverias.

"Why should we not sit down in the plaza?" responded the señora. "It is customary at this hour, and there will be music in a little while."

"By all means," said Lestrangle; "for we can look at the Cathedral while we are resting."

Miriam acquiescing, they crossed to the plaza and sat down on one of the benches that faced the side of the Sagrario. The air was full of fragrance from the garden behind them; a burst of music came from the band-pavilion; on the broad, smooth pavement people were walking; along the verge of the street, venders of all kinds of eatables were offering their fruits and *dulces*. The whole scene was full of picturesque animation and movement; while the magnificent mass of buildings before them, with its lines of quivering radiance, made an effect which the eye did not weary of admiring.

"I have never seen anything like it," said Lestrangle, speaking to himself, but uttering the

words unconsciously aloud. After he had done so he looked at Carmela and met a smile in her soft, dark eyes. "Ah, you understand English!" he said. "I had forgotten that. Now I will talk to you in that language."

"Oh, no!" she answered; "for, although I understand, I cannot speak it. I have read all the English books I could find, but I have had no one with whom to talk, and I know nothing of the pronunciation."

"But you must acquire the pronunciation," he said. "Some day you will want to go to the States to see your relatives there, and it would be inconvenient, to say the least, not to be able to speak English. Miriam and myself, I think, are the only members of the family who speak Spanish."

"It is not at all likely that I shall ever go," she answered, with a gentle dignity; "for I know nothing of these relatives, nor do they know anything of me."

"That is very true," he went on; "but it is not their fault any more than yours. I do not think that your father ever informed his family of his marriage. Consequently you must admit that it is not strange that none of us knew that we had a charming Mexican cousin."

She could not but smile. "You certainly were

not to blame for not knowing what you were not told," she said. "But indeed I have given little thought to the matter, as I never expected to see any of my American relatives."

"And probably cared very little to do so," he remarked, with a shrewd instinct. "If that is so I am doubly grateful for the kindness with which you have received us."

In the broad light of the illuminated building opposite he could see that she colored. "If I cared little," she said, "it was because I had never known or heard anything pleasant of Americans. Many of those who come here are rude and scornful, and have seemed to regard Mexicans as an inferior race while we"—she lifted her head a little proudly—"have certainly found them inferior to *our* standard of what is well-bred."

Mr. Lestrangle felt a slight thrill of shame as he remembered certain supercilious acts and words of his own when he first entered the country. Indeed had he not, only a few days before, spoken and felt in a manner which he was now unable to understand about the probability of finding a relative among these people?

"We are certainly a very unpleasant race,—we Anglo-Saxons," he said, candidly. "Dominant, arrogant, narrow-minded, possessed with the idea

that we have a right divine to rule the world, and to despise all the people whose methods and ideas differ from our own,—I really do not wonder that we are as a general rule cordially disliked. As far as I can judge, too, I think that we have been particularly ill represented in Mexico; and I blame no Mexican for disliking Americans. But believe me, my dear cousin, we are not all as bad as those whom you have known or heard of."

He thought that he had never seen anything more charming than her face, as she turned it quickly toward him, full of an expression almost contrite, and replied :

"I believed that always, and I am more than ever sure of it now. I am very happy to meet some one who can show me what my father was."

Again the fastidious young man winced a little; for it need hardly be said that he felt very sure that he belonged to a much higher order of beings than the cousin who had wandered down into Mexico and died. But, aware that Carmela could not be expected to understand this, he accepted the sweet cordiality of her words, and said to himself that she was lovely enough to deserve, if she had not possessed, a father equal to her ideal.

Presently, when Miriam declared herself rested, the party rose and wandered through the illuminated streets, spanned here and there with arches formed of the pretty, many-colored paper lanterns, and stretching away in lines of light as far as the eye could reach. As they wandered it was natural that Lestrangle should keep his place, so far as possible, by Carmela's side. The attraction of her beauty was deepened for him by an attraction of character which he had discerned in her from the first,—that indefinable quality which we call "interesting." Gentle and retiring as she was, there was no inanity about her. On the contrary, there was a thought behind every word that she uttered; and a turn of unexpectedness about these thoughts that was sometimes striking and always charming, as, becoming more at ease with him, she spoke freely; showing now and then a vein of poetic feeling which surprised him, and was evidently unconscious with herself.

As they talked, and he yielded himself entirely to the pleasure of drawing out this delicate, reserved nature, with its subtle charm of originality, he did not give a single consideration to the question of how she might be affected by this unusual intercourse, this spell of responsive sympathy, which is so strong even with those who know most of life and the world. What it was

likely to prove to a girl who as yet knew nothing of either, and whose nature rendered her peculiarly susceptible to such fascination, it was perhaps too much to expect that Mr. Lestrangle should ask. The delicate enjoyment of the moment was enough for him,—an enjoyment in which he felt well assured that Carmela shared.

And indeed it would have been strange had she not done so,—had not the charm of sympathy (that wonderful charm under which the thoughts expand, the mind opens freely, the words seem to come to the lips as if by inspiration), been felt by her as strongly as it is felt by all intellectual people; and the more strongly because it was something her life had never known before. She was surprised at the facility with which thoughts and feelings, which had been dumb before, now found expression, and at the sense of exhilaration that possessed her as they walked along the brilliantly decorated streets. Crowds of people were abroad; all Guadalajara was *en fête*; and under the dark blue sky the city shone like a great golden flower opened in Mary's honor.

“It was worth coming to Mexico for this night alone,” said Lestrangle presently. “I wish I could give you some idea of how charming it all is to me. Of course you feel it as deeply as, probably

more deeply than, I do. But it is in a different manner. What is familiar can never move us exactly as what is novel does."

"Perhaps it moves us more," she answered. "Surely I must feel this scene more deeply than one who is a stranger to it, and who does not believe in that which it celebrates. Though I have seen it so often, it thrills me like wonderful music,—like something so beautiful that it is beyond speech. For what touches one is the thought of all the love and homage by which it is inspired. You do not feel that."

"Oh, but I do!" he replied quickly. "You must not think me so insensible. I feel it as a beautiful ideal,—as one of the most touching tributes that I have ever witnessed to the excellence of purity. If all these lights were in honor—well, say some national feast, they would form as pretty a picture to the eye as now; but all the spiritual significance would be gone, and that is the soul that gives the charm."

"I think so," she said. But although she assented to his last words, she felt instinctively that there was something wanting in his appreciation. She did not understand the modern infidelity of the refined, which transforms Christian dogmas into vague, abstract virtues; but her own faith was too perfect and too warm for her not to feel

when faith was lacking. Nevertheless, it was pleasant to perceive that here was no scornful, no ignorantly derisive spirit, such as she had heard of among his countrymen in Mexico, but the enthusiastic admiration of a man of culture. She looked at him with something akin to gratitude in her beautiful eyes. "I am glad," she said, "that you like our *fiesta* so well. But perhaps you will not like such a crowd as this."

For, crossing a flowery plaza which had once been a secluded convent garden—where the hands of nuns planted the beautiful trees that now flung their shade over the despoilers, and also over many who had no share in such despoiling,—they came within sight of a wild and weird scene. Such, at least, it appeared to the two foreigners. In the noble old Church of San Felipe—formerly, with its large, accompanying buildings, the property of the Oratorians—the feast was being observed with great devotion and much ceremonial. The great doors stood wide open, although a crimson silk curtain hung low enough before the central entrance to shut off from the outside a view of the Blessed Sacrament, throned upon the altar amid hundreds of lights. The wide nave was thronged with a shifting but undiminishing mass of humanity; while all around the church, forming a crowd so dense that to

pass through it was difficult, the lower order of the people were assembled in multitude. Along the margin of the sidewalk flared the torches of the venders of tortillas, of sugar-cane, of the numerous fruits and vegetables which the Indians love,—making a scene impossible to find elsewhere in the world, and wildly picturesque in its striking contrasts.

“What a glorious old church!” said Lestrangle, looking at the splendid front of brown stone, richly carved in quaint device. “No, I don’t mind the people at all; they are so wonderfully picturesque. But what a scene! And are we going to enter?”

“So it seems,” answered Carmela, smiling, as they followed in the wake of Señora Echeveria’s portly form.

Miriam looked back at her brother with a smile. “I want to see the interior of the church,” she said; “so we are going in.”

It was a slow and difficult matter to make their way through the surging throng that surrounded the edifice and blocked its entrance. But Lestrangle would not have cared how long the passage lasted. Carmela, by his request, had taken his arm, and it was a pleasure to feel her depending on him for guidance; while at the same time he delighted his eye with a leisurely

observation of the scene around him, with all its wonderful contrasts and effects.

There was still another spectacle for them, when they finally found themselves in the church, where the vast nave was closely filled with a crowd, listening to a priest who was preaching from the pulpit. At least a part of the throng were listening; others came in, dropped on their knees, said their prayers, then rose and went out again, with the perfect freedom and ease which distinguish a Catholic people in a Catholic land, where no baleful Protestant spirit has come to levy fees of entrance into the house of God, to introduce hideous pews, and set the rich apart from the poor. In all the world there is no church more stripped of wealth than that of Mexico now; but no one has dreamed of introducing the money-changer into the temple. Free as air are the beautiful churches, and all their stately services, to the poorest in the land; and the greatest in place and state can command no exclusive spot within them.

Now, as often before, Miriam. Lestrangle was struck by this, as she stood beside her brother, while their companions knelt and crossed themselves in the rapid Spanish fashion. And while her eye passed over the throng, thinking how beautiful and Christian was this mingling of all

ranks and classes, the preacher's gaze fell on the two figures so strikingly unlike those around them ; and, after resting on them for an instant, noted their companions. It was only a momentary glance ; but when the party presently turned to go out, and Carmela and Lestrangle naturally fell together again, his gaze once more turned and rested on them.



CHAPTER V.

THE next morning Carmela was seated again in her favorite corner of the *patio*; but, instead of needlework, she had now an English book in her hands, which she was so absorbed in studying that she did not hear a step enter from the street, and the sudden stroke of the door-bell was necessary to rouse her. Then, glancing up quickly, she saw a tall man, draped in the graceful Spanish cloak which is the distinguishing dress of the priesthood since the Government forbade there appearance in public in the *soutane*, smiling on her through the bars of the iron gates. She sprang up, and, going forward eagerly, admitted him. It was the priest who had been preaching in San Felipe the night before. He had a face of mingled power and sweetness, characteristic of his race in its clear, olive-tinted skin, its finely chiselled features, and deep, dark eyes; but with a charm so personal and peculiar in its smile and expression that the pleasure with which Carmela greeted him was not surprising.

“You have not been to see us for some time,

Señor Padre," she said, when he entered. "It is good of you to come at last."

"I have been much engaged," he answered; "but it does not do to lose sight of one's friends too long. One never knows what may occur. Your parents are well?"

"Very well. Ah, mamma"—as Señora Echeveria advanced from a room near by,—"here is Padre Agustin come to see us!"

"You are a thousand times welcome!" said Señora Echeveria to the Father, who, as the mode of addressing him implied, belonged to one of the proscribed religious orders, a few members of which are still found in the Mexican cities, aiding the secular clergy in there arduous work. "We were at San Felipe last night and heard you preaching," she went on, after the usual salutations had been exchanged. "But we did not hear all of your sermon. I should have liked to do so, but we had some strangers, foreigners, with us."

"Who are not Catholics," said the priest. "I saw them. It surprised me a little to observe who they accompanied; for I did not imagine you had, or were likely to form, such acquaintances."

"A few days ago I should have said that we were not at all likely to do so," answered the

señora, smiling. "But unexpected things happen. These are American relatives of Carmela's. They seem very distinguished people; and I am glad she should have the opportunity to know something of her father's family."

"Ah, they are relatives of Carmela's!" repeated the priest, turning his dark eyes, which were yet very penetrating eyes, on the young girl. "And does she like them also?"

"Very much," Carmela answered, frankly. "They are very kind and pleasant; and, although of course they are different in many things from ourselves, I like the difference—I mean that I like to know what other people are."

"Especially people that you are connected with by blood—that is natural," said the Father. "And will they remain here long, these strangers?"

"They have no plans," said Señora Echeveria; "but it is likely that they may remain some time. They are here for the health of the young lady. She does not seem ill, but it appears that she cannot bear a cold climate. So they leave home in winter."

"And the gentleman is her husband?"

"Oh, no—her brother. It is not according to our custom that they should be travelling alone in this manner, but no doubt it is the custom of

their country ; and they seem to have been almost everywhere in the world. It is wonderful that people can like to take such journeys," added the señora, meditatively. "For me I have never been farther than Puebla, and I hope that I shall not ever have to take that journey again. To San Pedro in the summer and back to Guadalajara in the winter—it is enough."

Padre Agustin looked at Carmela, and saw another spirit in her eyes. He sighed a little. His interest in the girl had always been great, and he had felt a thrill of alarm for her when he saw the tall, fair stranger by her side the night before. Now he felt sure that this alarm was well founded. He did not at once fear (although he knew it was to be reckoned as a possible danger) any entanglement of the heart ; but he said to himself that the soul heretofore so peaceful would be filled with desires antagonistic to peace, —with longings for the world, and possibly with many ideas dangerous to faith. He read Carmela sufficiently to know that hers was no ordinary nature, and that dangers which would be no dangers at all to a commonplace girl would be fraught with peril for her.

"Since your friends are not Catholic, of what religion are they?" he asked, after a moment.

There was a slight pause. Neither Señora

Echeverian or Carmela felt able to answer this question. Then the former said :

“The young man seems very liberal and unprejudiced, but he does not appear to have much religion of any kind. He admires the Catholic religion, however ; and so does his sister. She was telling me last night that she thinks our ceremonies are beautiful. They are not like us, —these Americans, Father. Sometimes they have no religion and yet they are good people.”

By this rather obscure statement Señora Echeveria meant to say that the negation of religion in America often took the form of complete indifference combined with some natural virtues ; whereas in Mexico, as in the Catholic nations of Europe, it is always violently hostile to the Church. The Father, who readily understood her meaning, smiled.

“That is true,” he said ; “but such goodness is of a very limited character, and is generally associated with much worldliness. There is, however, great difference between those who have fallen into unbelief from Protestantism and those who have forsaken the Church. Yet I should not voluntarily seek association with either.”

“But in this case—” said Señora Echeveria.

“In this case you have no alternative. As relatives of her father, these strangers have a claim

upon Carmela ; and "—with another sigh—" no one can be shielded from all possibilities of harm, nor would it be well that it should be so."

"And pray what harm do you fear for me, Father, in this association?" the girl asked quickly, yet with respect.

Padre Agustin hesitated for a moment before answering. How could he make clear to her the dangers he foresaw? And would anything be gained by doing so? He decided that nothing would be gained, and so replied:

"There are few associations, my child, in which there are not some possibilities of harm ; and in those who are strangers—of whom we know nothing except that they are alien in faith and country—it is natural to suppose that these might exist. It is well to bear this in mind ; and if they do not exist, so much the better. To have been on our guard is only wise."

"It may be wise, but it seems to me also ungrateful to be on one's guard against kindness and consideration," she said. "And that is what my cousins show—not only to me, but to everything Mexican. If you knew them, Father, you would not fear that any harm could come to me through them."

He looked at the young face so full of ignorant confidence and trust ; and then, glancing at

Señora Echeveria's placid, smiling countenance, he knew that further words of warning would be useless. It was as he said. No human soul or life can be shielded from all possibilities of harm. It was necessary that Carmela should run the gauntlet of perils, that might, for a time at least, darken the fair horizon of her life, and only prayers could at present avail to help her.

"It is probable that if I knew your friends, I might find them all that you describe," he said, courteously. "Meanwhile, since they like our ceremonies and customs, do not fail to take them to the Santuario on the *fiesta* of Guadalupe."

"We were in the Santuario yesterday, and they admire it exceedingly," replied Carmela. "Señor Lestrangle intends to make a picture of it."

"He is an artist, then?"

"Only for amusement," remarked Señora Echeveria, quickly, anxious not to lower the importance of these new connections. "He has no need to paint pictures for money. But his sister says that he has a great talent."

"Ah!" said the priest, smiling. He probably thought that the opinion of a sister on such a point was not very conclusive; and that a young man who painted for amusement only was not very likely to accomplish much. At all events,

he changed the subject of conversation, and did not allude again to the Lestranges.

But Carmela by no means forgot what he had said. To listen with respect to all his opinions and admonitions had been the habit of her life, and now for the first time she felt in herself a spirit of opposition. It was unjust, she thought with something faintly approaching indignation, to judge unkindly, and suspect of possible harm, people whose only fault was that they had been born in another country, and inherited, through no fault of their own, another faith. She almost said to herself that Padre Agustin was narrow-minded, and she was certain that nothing could have been more unnecessary than his warnings. The charm of the strangers, with their knowledge of the world, and culture wider than any she had known before, had already wrought upon her deeply. New springs of thought and feeling had waked within her, and to suspect danger in anything so attractive as this association was too much to ask of her.

"Padre Agustin does not know them," she said to herself. "If he did he would think of them differently. He judges them from what he knows of other Americans, other Protestants, and that is not just."

And with this final reflection, this final rejec-

tion of the warning conveyed to her, she opened again the English book which Miriam had given her, and was soon absorbed in eager mastery of its idioms and ideas.

CHAPTER VI.

THE next day Miss Lestrangle came to return the call of Señora Echeveria, and to beg that Carmela might accompany her that afternoon on an excursion to San Pedro. She was as much charmed as her brother had been with the pretty, picturesque house, which made an altogether fitting environment for the graceful foreign cousin; and the entire episode of acquaintance seemed to her an interest agreeably provided by fate to prevent hopeless dulness in this strange city.

Señora Echeveria, who had been a little disturbed in mind by the words of Padre Agustin, was much reassured by this visit. Miriam was so cordial, so gracious and so enthusiastic when she spoke of the *fiesta* of the day before, that it was impossible to think of any danger for Carmela in association with so charming a person. Permission was therefore readily granted for the afternoon excursion, and the visit ended by Miss Lestrangle carrying off Carmela to lunch with them at the hotel.

A few hours later the three, who now felt as if

they had known one another for a long time, were seated in a tram-car, rolling rapidly toward the pretty suburban town of San Pedro—a place of summer residence for the inhabitants of Guadalajara. The road thither across the valley, with its gradual ascent, is one of the most delightful imaginable. Immense trees, with great gnarled trunks, spreading roots, and crowns of thickest, greenest shade, line the broad white highway, along which all the picturesque, Oriental-like life of the country passes—troops of laden *burros*, women draped in their blue mantles, sandalled men with scarlet blankets flung over their shoulders, cavaliers on small fiery horses, with silver-laced trousers and tall *sombreros*.

The tramway is higher than the road, and the passengers in the open cars look over the stone walls that bound it, across wide-spreading fields of green, to the blue masses of the distant, heavenly mountains. The town, when reached, is altogether charming; lying high, and commanding a beautiful view toward Guadalajara's ivory towers and gleaming domes, its verdant plain and azure heights. The clean, well-paved streets are lined chiefly by homes of the better class, closed and silent in winter, but full of life and animation in summer. As they passed along Carmela pointed out the one in which the Echeverias

spent what is known in Mexico as "the season of the rains."

"It seems very little of a climatic change from Guadalajara," observed Lestrangle; "and certainly not much of a change of any other kind. Fancy what our young ladies at home would think of it, Miriam!"

"There are multitudes of nice girls—ladies in birth and breeding—who never know as much change," replied Miriam. "It is a great mistake to make the fashionable rich a standard of comparison. They are only a minority of even the best people. For my part, I think this a most attractive place; and I have no doubt that when Guadalajara society transports itself here, it is very gay and pleasant.

"Oh, yes, it is very pleasant!" said Carmela. "People see more of one another than in the city, and life seems to go more easily. This is where we come in the evening for music. It is pretty, is it not?"

They agreed that it was very pretty—a large, hollow square, enclosed by wide, freshly frescoed arcades, for promenading. Miriam fancied it filled with its summer throng, with music rising and falling on the soft night air, and liked the picture exceedingly. Brilliant afternoon sunshine was falling over it now, however, and a sky of

turquoise looked down ; but, passing under the shade of the arcades, they came out at an arched portal, and, crossing the street, entered a shop which every tourist in Mexico knows well—that of Panduro, who models so admirably in clay. This was the objective point of their journey, and while Miriam loaded herself with perfect yet fragile figures that represent every phase of the picturesque life of Mexico, her brother descanted to Carmela on the wonderful plastic art displayed in these bits of delicately moulded clay, pointed out the perfect expression of the tiny faces and forms, that seemed almost instinct with life.

“It is absolute genius that is displayed in this work,” he said. “Yet the man who does it is a pure and, I suppose, uneducated Indian.”

“He is poor, and makes no more than a bare living by these things,” said Carmela. “Would you like to go to his house? You can see there some of his best work ; and he will model your bust in clay, if you wish—making a perfect likeness.”

“I should like to go to the house, but have no desire to be modelled. Miriam, if you have finished making your selections, we will go.”

Guided by Carmela, they set out ; and, following a dusty street into a poorer quarter of the town, presently passed through a gateway and

found themselves in the humble home of this Indian sculptor. But, though humble, it was scrupulously clean, and the unpaved court was filled with tropical trees, and great climbing roses that filled the golden air with fragrance. There was something sweet and attractive about the place, despite its poverty. A smiling woman brought out some chairs on the rough corridor before the house. Opposite, across the freshly swept court, was the workshop, its shelves filled with figures representing an art that anywhere in the highways of the world would have brought its possessor fame and fortune. Panduro himself met them as they approached,—a pure Indian, as Lestrangle had said, with nothing in outward appearance to distinguish him from any *aguador* or *cargador* of his race. Yet in those slender brown fingers was the art of Michael Angelo and Canova,—different only in degree, not in kind; for no person can examine his work without perceiving the remarkable genius which it indicates.

Lestrangle praised it as warmly as it deserved, and with an artistic appreciation which made the dark eyes of his listener shine with gratification. It was a pleasant hour that they spent in this humble *atelier*, handling the delicate figures; while outside the door flowers were blooming

under the deep blue sky, and the air came in full of soft, caressing warmth. Presently the woman who received them first entered the room with a handful of blossoms, which she divided between the two ladies.

"She has given none to you," said Carmela to Lestrangle, as they passed out. "We must share ours with you."

"She knew that they would have much more value if they came from your hands," he replied. "Just that half-opened rose, no more. *Mille gracias!* I have no intention to be sentimental, but I should not be surprised if I put it away as a memento of this afternoon in San Pedro."

"And of the Indian sculptor," she said, smiling.

He thought it much more likely to be of herself, but did not say so, only placed the flower in his coat and walked on, enjoying the perfect day, the foreign sights and sounds, and the companionship which gave a zest to all, as he had often failed to enjoy occasions that seemed to offer much more.

For an hour or two they loitered about the pleasant, quaint little town; and Lestrangle stumbled upon one of those beautiful old carved church-fronts which are scattered all over Mexico. They wandered into the soft gloom of the

interior, where a number of children were reciting catechism, and where their presence was evidently so much of a distraction to these catechumens that they soon retired. As they came out it was to meet a glorious effect—golden sunset clouds tossed on a rosy sky behind the noble towers and dome of La Parroquia.* They paused to admire it; and, while Miriam moved away a short distance for a better point of view, Lestrangle said to Carmela:

“One would have to travel far to find a more beautiful picture than that, and yet it is but one of a myriad scattered over this wonderful land of yours. To think that, while we have been crossing the ocean for fifty years or more to worship at the shrines of the picturesque in the Old World, there was such a country as this, almost unknown, at our very doors!”

“You like our country, then?” said the girl, smiling. “I am glad of that. You do not, perhaps, think it strange that my father stayed here?”

“Strange!” he repeated—who up to this time considered it very strange indeed. “Not at all. Why should one ever wish to leave it? That is my feeling at present. I have never known a

* The parish church.

country which fascinated me so much. It is singular," he continued, after a moment's silence, "that in coming here I never once thought of the kinsman of whom I had heard in my boyhood, much less anticipated finding such a cousin as yourself. It is difficult for me to realize now that you *are* my cousin."

"Why?" she asked, with some surprise.

"Because you are so different from all my other cousins, I suppose. And I have a goodly number. But they are all commonplace, just like other people; whereas *you*—"

It was an expressive pause, but perhaps Carmela did not appreciate all that it expressed. She looked at him with her soft dark eyes, innocent as a fawn's, and continued:

"No doubt I am very different from them. But it may be that I seem to you strange because you do not know many Mexican girls. If you did, you would probably find me commonplace too."

"I could never find you anything but charming," he said, with decision. "That sounds like a point-blank compliment, which is always abominable; but it really is not. It is a simple statement of a fact. You are as charming as your country, my dear cousin; and I can say no more."

She blushed as rosy-red as the sunset, and seemed about to reply, when suddenly from the great tower above the Angelus rang out. She made the Sign of the Cross, and, turning her head away, remained motionless for a few moments in a silence which Lestrangle did not break. When the solemn strokes had ended, and the bells were ringing, in such a clashing peal as only Mexican bells can ring, the joy of the Incarnation, she turned and looked again at him. The color had now faded out of her cheeks, and she spoke as quietly and simply as before :

“You are very kind to think so well of me ; but since you do not know very much of me yet, it would be better not to judge. When you know other Mexican girls, you will find, as I have said, that I am very commonplace.”

“In that case may I not be allowed to find all Mexican girls charming?” he asked, with a smile that would have disarmed one of sterner mould than Carmela.

She smiled too. “I have no right to find fault with you for that,” she said. “And indeed I did not mean to find fault at all ; for that would surely be very ungrateful.”

“Oh, it is not a matter calling for gratitude,” he responded. “How can one help thinking

well or ill of a person according as he or she impresses him? That church tower yonder might as well be grateful because I perceived its beauty."

"It certainly makes a striking picture," said Miriam, rejoining them. "I wonder you do not sketch it, Arthur."

"I have sketched many church towers since I have been in Mexico," he answered; "so I prefer to keep this one simply in my memory. Besides, nothing could give the color-effect."

Carmela looked at him a little wistfully. "I wish that you would sketch it," she remarked. "I should like to see your work."

"It should be done immediately," he replied, "if I had any materials with me. To be truthful, I forgot my sketch-book this afternoon. But if you wish to see my work, I shall have great pleasure in showing you all that I have. And, by the bye, I consider it positively a promise about your picture."

"About my picture?"

"Yes; you cannot have forgotten that I am to paint your picture and that of the Santuario. You know you promised to allow me to do so."

"Did I?" she said, a little doubtfully. A thought of Padre Agustin at this moment came to her—why she did not know. "If so, I was

wrong," she added ; "for of course I must first know if mamma objects."

"Why should she?" the young man asked. "I am sure that when I place the matter before her in the right light, she cannot possibly object. I have no fear of refusal from Señora Echeveria, if *you* consent."

"I should like it very much," she answered frankly—the momentary thought banished. "It would be a great interest to me."

"Then we may consider the matter settled," he said. "To-morrow I shall get a canvas and begin. And what an interest it will be to *me* !"

"I am very sure of that," observed Miss Lestranger, a little dryly. "But whether Carmela will be equally interested is what I doubt. He is very exacting," she added, addressing Carmela ; "and has no mercy on his sitters."

"Are you afraid?" asked Lestranger, with a direct gaze into Carmela's eyes.

And she, in foolish confidence, replied : "No."

CHAPTER VII.

"It is as I knew it would be," said Miss Le-strange, looking at a canvas before her. "The thing resolves itself into a picture of Carmela, with the Santuario indicated as a background."

"And why not?" asked her brother, who, flung into a large chair, was reading near by. "I am sure Carmela is a very much more interesting subject than the Santuario."

"You are certainly succeeding with her better than you have ever before succeeded with any subject. This promises to be a beautiful picture. It shows what you can do when you have an incentive, Arthur."

"What incentive do you fancy that I have here?" he inquired, without lifting his eyes from his book.

"The incentive of representing worthily such a face as one does not often see," she answered. "The artistic impulse is very strong in you,—I give you full credit for that. You have caught a certain expression that is dormant in Carmela's face most of the time, but that comes out whenever she is moved by any strong emotion. It is a

kind of rapt, exalted look. In your picture here she has the aspect of a young saint preparing for some heroic sacrifice."

Lestrangle threw down his book now, and, rising, stood in front of the picture himself. "You are seeing more in it than I intended," he said. "I have only tried to represent Carmela's ordinary expression when she is in church."

"You have caught it very cleverly; but it is intensified a little, no doubt from the artistic impulse to heighten effect; or perhaps because by the same artistic impulse, you have seen more deeply than you were aware of."

"Nonsense, Miriam! Don't become transcendental. I have simply tried to paint the devotional look that Carmela's face assumes when she is praying. So far, I confess I am well satisfied with what I have done."

He had, as his sister said, good reason to be satisfied. It was, in every respect, an excellent piece of work that rested on his easel. The rich, dim interior of the old church was as yet merely indicated, though there was an admirable suggestion of its mellow gloom; but the girl kneeling on the pavement was painted with a delicacy and skill such as he had never shown before. On the beautiful face, uplifted toward the benignant figure of Our Lady of Guadalupe, there was

an expression of ardent, exalted feeling, that made Miriam's comparison very exact. One would have said indeed that here was a young soul preparing to tread some high path of sacrifice, and asking the strength which would enable her to do so.

Two or three weeks had now passed since the first meeting of the Lestranges with their cousin. Eager to go to work at once on the picture for which he had obtained Carmela's consent to sit, Arthur decided that they must leave their hotel for apartments where he could have a studio with abundance of light and space. Thanks to the assistance of Señora Echeveria, this was soon accomplished. Four large rooms on the upper floor of a pleasantly situated house were engaged, and the two young strangers were quickly domiciled therein. Thither Carmela came almost every day, sat to Arthur, talked Spanish and English with Miriam, and now and then went out with them on wandering expeditions about the beautiful city.

Such close association must necessarily end in strong feeling of one kind or another. Either people will learn to like one another very much, or the reverse. Here there could be no question of the liking. Every day the Lestranges were more charmed by the young Mexican girl, with

her eager, flexible mind, her lovely nature, and her poetic feeling; while she found in them a culture for which she had always instinctively longed, as well as characters pleasant and sympathetic in themselves.

They were still standing before the picture, discussing it, when Carmela entered, with her accustomed black drapery over her head,—the drapery which Miriam had more than once said made her look like a nun.

“Why should it give me, more than others, this look?” she asked one day.

“I don’t know,” Miss Lestrangle answered; “except that you have the type of face one associates with the cloister. Others may wear the dress, but worldliness shows in all the lines of their faces; while you look as if you never thought of the world.”

“It is a great mistake,” said Carmela; “for I do. I think I should like the world very much. When you talk, I feel as if I longed to see all its beautiful things, to possess all its culture, I am afraid I should even like its vanities.”

“No, you would not,” replied the other, rashly. “You would only like its best things, and those are given us to enjoy. If everybody was ascetic, there would be no culture in the world, no art, no letters. You are made to like all these things,

Carmela ; but when you put that shawl over your head, you look as if you had renounced them."

She had the look of having renounced them when she came in to-day ; but she smiled with a brightness which changed the whole character of her face when she saw the two figures standing before the easel.

"What is it?" she asked, going up to them. "Are you criticising the picture?"

"On the contrary, we are admiring it," Miriam answered. "I was just telling Arthur that I do not think he has ever done any better work. You have proved a veritable inspiration, Carmela."

"I am glad of that," said Carmela, looking at Arthur, and still smiling. "But I do not think he needed any."

He met her glance, and it seemed for a moment as if he could not remove his own from her face. Its sweetness as well as its beauty seemed to sink into his soul. It was indeed a face to prove an inspiration in the best sense ; for only lovely and noble things appeared in it. But as her eyes sank under his steady, direct gaze, he remembered himself, and, turning around quickly, took up his palette.

"No one needs it more," he said. "But my

colors are all mixed. Are you ready to let me study you a little?"

She placed herself in position; and while he began to paint, she went on talking to Miriam. They had of late insisted that she should practise English in conversation, and both of them were always ready to assist and correct her. But to-day all the corrections were left to Miriam. Arthur seemed absorbed in his painting, and hardly spoke at all. His sister glanced at him once or twice; but, recognizing the signs of a moodiness that frequently fell upon him, she for some little time made no effort to draw him into the current of talk. Presently, however, feeling curious as to the cause of this sudden cloud, she decided to try the experiment of leaving him alone with Carmela,—for it may be said that Miss Lestrangle had very lax ideas on the subject of chaperonage. A pause in the conversation gave her the opportunity desired. She rose with a few words of apology, and, saying that she would return in a few minutes, left the room.

The same thing had occurred several times before, so Carmela thought nothing of it. But Arthur had a sense of vexation as he glanced around and saw the tall, slender figure disappear. He said to himself that to have the necessity of talking thrust upon him when he did not feel

disposed for the effort, was very disagreeable ; but he hardly deceived himself in thinking this. He knew that the reason of his reluctance to be left alone with Carmela was very different. He had been playing on the verge of pleasant sentiment for some time, but now he began to fear that some impulse beyond his control might hurry him into taking a plunge which he would afterward regret. No man ever had a more salutary fear of anything than Lestrangle had of his own impulses ; and he had been suddenly startled into the knowledge that it was necessary at present to be on his guard against one which would prove more than usually dangerous.

Serenely unconscious of his perturbation, Carmela began to speak, lapsing from English into Spanish.

"I wonder," she said, "that you do not paint all the time, when you can paint so well."

"That would be to convert a pleasure into a drudgery," he answered. "There is nothing of which one does not tire when one does it all the time."

"Even if one loves it?" she asked, with some surprise.

"What is there that one loves all the time?" he replied, with involuntary cynicism. "There are periods when I fairly hate the sight of colors

and brushes. I should be miserable then if I were forced to paint. And so it is with a great many other things. There are times when I tire of everything that I like at other times. You cannot understand that?"

"No," she said, wonderingly; "I do not understand it at all, and I think you scarcely mean it. You cannot tire of *everything*."

"I have never found anything yet of which I did not tire. That is the simple truth. Perhaps my artistic temperament is to blame for it. I don't know—I only know the fact."

She was silent for a moment or two, meditating, as it seemed, on such a remarkable confession. Looking at her as she sat with lids down-cast, one of the impulses which he so deeply distrusted seemed to tell Arthur Lestrangle that here was a charm of which it might be possible that he would not tire.

"You are disgusted with me, perhaps?" he said, beginning to regret his candor. "You never heard any one acknowledge such a nature before."

She lifted her beautiful, dark eyes to his face; a gleam of sunlight through the broad window, open to the deep blue sky, fell on the hair above her brow and seemed to gild it with a nimbus; while all the delicate charm of her face was re-

vealed in the clear, searching light, as she answered with gentle seriousness :

“No, I am not disgusted with you ; but, if you speak in earnest, I am very sorry for you. It would be terrible to have nothing which one was certain of loving all the time.”

“Ah, you think so because you have a constant nature !” he said, in a tone of envy. “Sometimes I wish that I too had such a nature ; but again I think that it would be terrible to be tied always, even in affection, to one passion, one fancy, one pursuit.”

Was it a perverse spirit that prompted him to such candor, or an impulse to warn both himself and her of the danger that might lie in their intercourse ? Whichever it was, a spirit of repentance seemed to seize him the next moment : for he came and sat down by her.

“Don’t think too badly of me,” he said, “because I am so candid. Perhaps the circumstances of my life have had something to do with forming this nature. When I was quite a boy an aunt, who is a very wealthy woman—a widow without children,—took a fancy to me, and in a manner adopted me as her heir. I say in a manner, for she has never declared her intention of leaving her fortune to me, but she has allowed everyone to suppose that she will do so :

and she has always supplied my wants so liberally that I have had no incentive to exertion. At least not what is generally supposed to be the chief incentive—the need to make money. Miriam will tell you that but for this fact I should not be the amateur and *dilettante* in art that I am. But I doubt if under other circumstances I should be an artist at all; for I certainly should not have chosen art as the drudgery by which to make money.”

“No?” said Carmela, looking at him earnestly.

“What then?”

He hesitated a moment. “I have really never considered,” he said. “There did not seem a necessity to do so.”

“But might not a necessity arise?—might not your aunt disappoint you at last? One hears of such things.”

“It is possible but hardly probable. She has never been a capricious woman, and she is much attached to me. Of course if I disappoint her exceedingly, she might show her displeasure in the customary manner of testators. But that is not very likely to happen. She generally approves of what I desire to do.”

He did not add that he was not likely to do anything of which she disapproved. Indeed it is doubtful if he acknowledged as much to himself

for there are natures expert in concealing from themselves any facts disagreeable to their vanity or self-love. It was more agreeable to conceive of his aunt as approving all that he did, than of himself as refraining from doing anything of which she disapproved.

The conversation was interrupted at this point by the reappearance of Miriam, who, resuming her seat, asked Carmela if arrangements had been perfected for a proposed excursion to the Barranca de Portillo.

"Yes," the girl answered; "it is arranged that we go to-morrow, if you like. We will start early, take the tramway to Atemajac, and there obtain *burros* on which to make the descent of the barranca."

"I hope that I shall not feel as if I were mounted on a Newfoundland dog," remarked Miss Lestrangle, good-naturedly. "Some of these *burros* are wonderfully small."

"They are strong, although they are small," answered Carmela. "I do not think you need fear that your weight will prove too much for any one of them."

"And, then, they are so picturesque and Oriental," observed Lestrangle. "Surely, Miriam, those things will reconcile you to any inconvenience attending their use."

"If you prefer horses, we might obtain them," said Carmela ; "but *burros* are usually employed for the barranca."

"I have no doubt Señor Echeveria knows what is best, and whatever he provides I will ride," said the young girl. "You may tell him we will be ready to start early and promptly to-morrow morning."

CHAPTER VIII.

IN the coolness of the early Mexican morning—which always seems like a new birth of the world, so fresh, so radiant is it—the party for the Barranca de Portillo met in front of the Cathedral, where the tramway for Atemajac starts. The doors of the great church were open; the gleam of candles shone through the glass of the screens placed before them; the odor of incense and sound of chanting came out to the street. People were hastening toward the portals, but Señor Echeveria shook his head as he saw Carmela glance wistfully in that direction.

“We have not time,” he said. “We would lose our car, and be late in reaching Atemajac. That will not do. We must make the ride to the Barranca in the cool of the day.”

“Besides, Carmelita, you know that you have already heard Mass at Santa Monica,” remarked one of her brothers.

“Oh,” said Carmela, with a smile, “I have no wish to detain you! It is quite true that we must start early from Atemajac. And here is our car.”

They clambered into it—a party consisting of the Lestranges, Señor Echeveria, Carmela, two Echeveria boys, aged fifteen and twelve respectively, and a gentleman known familiarly as Don Salvador, whose surname the Lestranges found it difficult to remember because they so seldom heard it. He was an intimate friend of the Echeveria family,—a stately, courteous man of about thirty-five, whom Miss Lestrange suspected of being a possible suitor of Carmela's, although she had not mentioned this suspicion to her brother.

In the delicious freshness of the morning it was pleasant to be whirled, at the rapid rate of locomotion peculiar to Mexican tramways, along the clean handsome city streets, and out into the sunny open country beyond the gates. Far and wide stretched the beautiful level plain on which Guadalajara stands ; while in the distance, draped in soft blue mist, rose the mountains that encircle it, wearing such heavenly tints of color as are hardly to be seen elsewhere in the world.

The three miles dividing the city from the town of Atemajac were soon covered by the mules, that galloped in lively fashion down grade ; while Don Salvador pointed out in the distance a picturesque mass of buildings surmounted by a dome, and told the strangers that it was the famous

sanctuary of Zapopau, once a great Franciscan monastery, the seat of piety, of learning, of industry, and the diffusing centre of material and spiritual good for a wide extent of country. To-day the monks are gone; half the monastery is converted, according to the highly economical custom of the Mexican Government, into a barracks; the rest, with its long corridors lined with cells, its cloisters and stalls, is left to silence and decay. The library is a ruin; and the once flourishing town, that depended on the monastery for its prosperity, is a melancholy picture of deserted houses falling to decay; while only the church with its revered sanctuary, preserves the whole spot from absolute desertion.

Reaching Atemajac, the *burros* for the expedition—ordered the day before by Señor Echeveria—were found awaiting them. Then came some difficulty and much amusement; for those who had never before tried to ride on a pack-saddle found it by no means easy at first. Miss Lestrangle in particular declared that she could never possibly balance herself on a flat surface, without stirrup or bridle by which to keep her seat, and with no means of controlling the movements of the animal beneath her.

“The men who accompany us on foot will look after the *burros*,” said Señor Echeveria; “and

one of them shall be detailed for your special service. For a bridle we will tie a rope around the neck of your animal, so that you will have something to hold."

"A semblance at least, if not a reality, of control," observed Arthur, laughing. "I think it better to frankly accept the situation, and wallow one's self to be carried along like a bag of charcoal, at the sweet will of the *burro* and his drivers."

"It is the best plan," said Don Salvador, who understood and spoke English very well.

It was, indeed, the only plan. And so they set out,—a very disorderly throng, since the *burros* rubbed against one another without any order of precedence; while the drivers prodded and expostulated with them, and made the matter worse instead of better. When fairly out of the streets of the town, however, they settled into a little more regular progression; and, although Le-strange was conscious that riding a pack-saddle is by no means the most graceful position in which a man can be placed, he had at least the consolation that he looked no worse than his companions, but probably a little better than Señor Echeveria with his rotund proportions, and Don Salvador with his long legs.

There is the advantage in riding a *burro*, that his rider has ample opportunity for observing all

surroundings; and it is a charming road from Atemajac to the mouth of the Barranca: winding through picturesque villages, past mills fortified like castles, over clear, bright streams, and across a wide stretch of plateau,—Guadalajara lying in the distance, with its tall white towers and shining domes; while the azure mountains form a frame for the perfect picture.

Lestrangle, by some means known only to himself and his animal, managed to keep near Carmela, who sat her pack-saddle with perfect composure and even with grace, looking as demure as an Eastern maiden. He was in one of his most companionable moods, and it was a well-known fact to his family and friends that when he chose he could be "delightful"; so it was perhaps not strange that Carmela found him so on this occasion. The brilliant day, the exhilarating atmosphere, the wide, fair scene, and the dark eyes that met his own with so much sweetness and appreciation, proved very real inspirations; and there were two at least of the party who did not find the road long to the mouth of the Barranca.

But this, when reached, was a great surprise to the two strangers. They had expected to see a ravine among the hills that bounded the horizon on all sides; but instead, while still in the midst

of the level plain, they suddenly came to a vast rift in the earth—a mammoth excavation, hewn out, as it were, by past volcanic convulsions. Five or six miles long and at least two thousand feet deep, this wonderful cañon is not more than a quarter of a mile wide, and is of the wildest, most picturesque beauty. It is descended on one side by a well-paved road, bounded on the outward edge by a stone wall about four feet high, to protect travellers from the danger of falling over the abrupt precipices into the depths below. Winding constantly to right and to left, in order to obtain the necessary grade to permit man or animal to climb the stupendous heights, there is hardly a hundred feet of level way upon this road ; while above it rise great cliffs and masses of rock, towering higher and higher as the road itself descends deeper into the vast earth-opening. Far below, a stream—which forms a beautiful fall at the head of the cañon—flows in continuous cascades, on its way to join the great river at the end of the Barranca. The opposite wall of the cañon consists of immense precipitous cliffs of porphyritic rock, absolutely bare of vegetation ; but on the side of the road small streams constantly burst forth and flow downward, with the musical sound of gushing, falling water ; while their moisture stimulates the growth of

plants, ferns, mosses, and even trees, to such a degree that the great heights which tower above the road are beautiful with a wealth and variety of greenness rarely seen in sun-parched Mexico.

The sight of all this wonderful flora—of the damp, shady masses of rock covered with rare plants and vines,—together with the fact that sitting on a flat saddle, without pommel, stirrup, or bridle, is not the easiest thing possible when the animal that wears the saddle is descending an incline of forty-five degrees, induced Miss Lestrangle to slip from the back of her donkey to the ground. Her example was speedily followed; and while the *burros*, so unexpectedly relieved, clattered with their drivers down the steep way, four at least of the party followed on foot hardly able to find words to express their admiration of the picturesque beauty around them.

Lestrangle's sketch-book appeared at once; and now and again, at some fresh turn of the road, he paused to transfer with rapid strokes the outlines of the scene to his page.

"You will make our Barranca famous, Señor," said Don Salvador, looking with sincere admiration at his facile work.

The young man shrugged his shoulders. "It is not in my power to make your Barranca

famous Señor," he answered. "These sketches are only for my own gratification. But it surely deserves fame. It seems to me I have never seen a more beautiful spot."

Increasing in beauty and impressive grandeur as they descended deeper, until the vast heights rising overhead seemed almost to exclude the sky, they presently reached the banks of the stream, where, on terraces—formed ages since by the sedimentary deposits washed from the mountain sides,—forests of luxuriant banana trees grow, with many other tropical fruits. Here the road became level, and, mounting their *burros*, the party rode through a picturesque Indian village; the houses of adobe, covered with a thatch of banana leaves and bark, resting immediately against the masses of rock that form the pass. A turn of the way, and lo! rushing with swift, turbulent current, at the foot of the mountains that rise above it, was the largest river in Mexico—the Rio Grande de Santiago,—at this point a noble, wide stream. A hundred yards or so of the road winds along its bank, lined with the dwellings of the laborers who cultivate the products of this wonderful place; then comes a gateway, through which Señor Echeveria led the way into the outer court of a large dwelling, with a long corridor in front, supported on handsome

arches, and an inner court filled with orange and coffee trees.

"This is positively like enchantment," said Miriam. "I had no idea that we should find any human habitation at the end of so wild and difficult a way. The village was a sufficient surprise; but what is the meaning of a house of this kind?"

"This, observed Señor Echeveria, "is the house of the *haciendado*, or owner of all the lands down here. He lives in Guadalajara, but comes here occasionally. Do you like the place?"

"It is the most picturesque I have ever seen," she answered enthusiastically, looking up at the immense mountain heights, which, clothed with varied foliage, rose almost immediately behind the house; and then at the bold, rushing river in front; while the dwelling itself formed such an adjunct to the picture as only a Spanish dwelling could, with its long arcade, its chapel at the end, its *huerta*, or garden, and splendid trees.

"I have never seen a spot that I liked so well," said Lestrangle, as he lifted Carmela from her donkey. "How delightfully one could live here amid such surroundings, and forget the world! And yet the owner lives in Guadalajara!"

"He probably does not wish to forget the world," remarked Carmela, with a smile, "And

you—perhaps you might remember it after a while, if you were indeed placed here to live.”

“I am afraid you think that I do not know my own mind very well,” he replied, a little offended, more by the irony of her tone than by the words.

She looked up at him, still smiling. “Have you, then, forgotten,” she said, “what you told me only yesterday—that you could not imagine caring for anything always? I judge, therefore, that you would not care very long to remain away from the world in such a place as this.”

He looked a little disconcerted. “You certainly take all that one says *au pied de la lettre*,” he answered. “I perceive that I was entirely too candid yesterday.”

“No,” she said, more gravely, as they followed the others into the shade of the corridor, where a long stone bench offered a seat; “you were not too candid. I am very glad that you told me so much of yourself.”

“I am not glad, if it makes you think ill of me,” he began, impetuously—but their approach to the rest of the party made it impossible to say more.

CHAPTER IX.

LESTRANGE had no immediate opportunity to renew his interrupted conversation with Carmela. Yet he felt impatient until it was renewed; for he was certain that his candor of the day before had been misunderstood, and that he had by no means placed his character in as favorable a light as he desired. Her last words left him restless and ill at ease, but it was not until after luncheon that he was able to ask an explanation of them. This luncheon was taken seated comfortably at a table in a pretty, frescoed room, into which they were hospitably invited by an elderly woman, who was in charge of the house. The large basket packed by Señora Echeveria seemed inexhaustible in its contents; and the appetites of the party appeared to Lestrangle also inexhaustible; although it was, in fact, after their appetites were satisfied that they lingered, talking while they trifled with the fruits and *dulces*, and drank the light sweet wine of Aguas Calientes.

But finally the young man's impatience grew too great for his control, and he rose to his feet, saying, "This is all very pleasant, my friends,

but time is passing ; presently the order will be given to mount *burros* and start homeward, and I shall have made no sketches of this wonderfully picturesque place. With your permission, therefore, I go to make them."

"We admire your industry, Señor," remarked Don Salvador ; "and would emulate it if we were able to do so."

Miriam smiled. "Arthur's industry is very spasmodic," she observed ; "but I am afraid we, too, are wasting time, when we should be exploring the beauty around us."

"The *huerta* is well worth seeing," said Don Salvador. "It is filled not only with coffee-trees, but with many other tropical plants which do not grow on the plateau."

"The *huerta*—that is the garden, is it not? Yes, I want to see that ; for I was admired it as we sat on the corridor. Carmela, you will come?"

"Presently,—I must first attend to this," replied Carmela, indicating the *débris* of the luncheon. "Do not wait for me."

When she emerged from the house, several minutes later, the shady alleys of the garden had apparently absorbed all the party ; for not even Señor Echeveria was in sight. She paused for a moment, glancing around as if in search of some one, and a figure at once arose from the roots

of a great spreading tree in the corner of the court.

"I have been waiting for you," said Arthur, coming forward quickly. "I want your advice about a good point of view for a sketch. Come and tell me what you think of the one I have selected."

"I said that I would follow the others into the garden," she answered, hesitating a little.

"But why?" (with some impatience). "Coffee-trees may be new to Miriam, but they are not new to you. And she has Don Salvador and your father both with her to explain things. Come over here under this glorious old tree. I have arranged a charming seat for you, and you can tell me if I have found a good view."

"But you know that I am no judge of that," she said, smiling at the insistence of his tone.

But he carried his point. She went with him to the place he had selected, admiring the view of rushing river and splendid heights, and took the seat which he had arranged for her on a massive root of the noble tree. Certainly it was a most picturesque spot. Behind the long, low, arcaded dwelling, immense cliffs, thickly covered with verdure, rose higher than sight could reach; in front swept the majestic, mountain-shadowed river, its swift current crossed by a ferry-boat.

which presented a continually varying picture as it passed from bank to bank.

Arthur sketched diligently and rather silently for a few minutes after Carmela joined him ; then, mindful that they were likely to be interrupted by the others at any moment, he suddenly plunged into the subject uppermost in his thoughts.

“Why should you be glad because I told you so much of myself yesterday?” he asked, abruptly.

She started and looked at him for an instant, as if doubting whether she heard him aright ; for the few words exchanged on their arrival had not dwelt in her memory as in his. But the next moment she remembered, and a slight color rose into her cheeks.

“Is it not always well to know people as they really are, and not merely as one may fancy them?” she asked. “*I think so.*”

“But I am not talking of people,” he replied. “I am speaking of myself. Please allow the subject to remain particular, not general. You mean that you think it well to know *me* as I am, and not as you were inclined to fancy me?”

The color deepened in her cheeks, and she did not answer immediately ; but, after a slight pause, she looked at him and said, with the beau-

tiful simplicity and directness he had often admired in her :

“Yes, I mean that. If I am to know you at all, is it not well that I should know you correctly?”

“I have no other desire than that you should know me correctly,” he answered, with an earnestness that probably imposed upon himself. “But I do not wish to be misrepresented by myself any more than by others; and I am afraid that I did misrepresent myself yesterday. I said more than I meant—much more than I meant you to take seriously. I was in a mood when it pleased me to think and speak ill of myself. Have you not known such a mood?”

She shook her head. “No,” she answered. “When I examine my conscience I often think ill of myself, but it does not please me to do so; and that is not what you call ‘a mood.’”

“Far from it, he observed, smiling. “That is serious business, while mine—well, I am afraid mine was not serious at all. I certainly never intended you to believe that I had no constancy in my nature,—no power of recognizing what is good and holding fast to it.”

“You said that you could not imagine anything in the world of which you would not tire.”

“I *said!*” he repeated, impatiently,—“oh, yes, I said, as I have often said, many foolish things ;

but one does not expect to be judged by such utterances. People understand that one is not in earnest. Why, if you think such a thing of me, you must consider me one of the most contemptible of human beings."

The injured tone of this remark might have amused Carmela, had she been susceptible of amusement at the moment ; but she was too anxious to disclaim the opinion imputed to her, to remember how entirely it was his own fault if she entertained it.

"No," the young girl answered, quickly. "It would not be your fault if you changed in feeling. How could you help that? Perhaps you have forgotten, but you said—"

"Spare me the repetition of it," he interrupted, half laughing, half vexed. "Or, rather, tell me, Carmela, what I can do to efface the unfortunate words from your memory. For there is no one—on one in the world—whose good opinion I value as I do yours."

The vehemence of the last words touched the girl, whose heart was already dangerously inclined toward him. A dewy, luminous moisture came into her eyes as she said: "And why should you think that you have lost my good opinion? That is not altered. I only thought it was well to know what you said of yourself, if—if it were

true; because then one would not count too much on the—how shall I say it?—the lasting of your kind feeling and your recollection, when you went away.”

Her voice sank a little—in spite of herself trembling slightly—over the last words; and at the sound Arthur Lestrangle lost control of himself completely.

“If I went away, to the ends of the earth, do you think that I could ever forget *you*?” he demanded, impetuously. “Carmela, Carmela, my dearest, do you not know what I feel for you? You have my whole heart; it has been yours since the first day I saw you, and it will be yours forever. What I was saying in idle, foolish fashion yesterday had no relation whatever to you. I love you to-day, and I will love you as long as I know what love is. Fancies may come and go, but this will never change.”

She looked at him with eyes that seemed dazzled as if by sudden radiance. How could she fail to believe him? Older heads, and hearts less tender, might have been beguiled when for the first time passion spoke in living words to ears only too ready to hearken.

“You love me!” she said, after a moment, drawing in her breath quickly, as if under the shock of a great surprise. “That is strange. You

have seen so much of the world, you have known so many women, while I—I am only a Mexican girl, who has seen and known nothing.”

“It is not what one has seen and known, but what one *is* that makes one charming or the reverse,” said Lestrangle. “Every word that you utter, every look that you give, is adorable. I cannot tell you why—I can give no reason whatever ; simply I find you so, that is all. I met my fate the first moment I looked into your eyes ; and the conviction of it has grown upon me every day since then. As for my folly of yesterday—I talked in that way, knowing while I talked, that there was one spell I had no power to struggle against, one charm that I could never forget, one love that would make constancy a necessity, not a virtue. Do not think of it again, my Carmela ! Only tell me if in that heart whose constancy I do not doubt, you have any love for me.”

The soft, dark gaze met his with a look that answered him without need of words, although the words came afterward.

“I love you—yes,” she said ; “but that is not strange, for you have seemed to me from the first an embodiment of everything that I have dreamed of all my life. But I never imagined that you would care for me ; and when you talked in that way yesterday, I said to myself that it

was good for me to understand that when you went away you would think no more of anything here, and that if you stayed you would grow tired. Stop! let me speak"—as he endeavored to interrupt her. "I want to tell you now that I would rather you went away and left me, even if it were to die, than to stay after you have grown tired."

"Good heavens!" cried Lestrangle. "Can I never persuade you to forget those ridiculous, idle words? Can I never make you believe that they had nothing to do with what I feel for you? If I cannot win your trust, what am I to do? And trust is impossible as long as you think such things of me."

"I think nothing but what is good," she answered. "I only wanted to tell you that, because it seems to me it is possible. But if you tell me that it is not so, then I will try to believe you. It is like a dream that you should love me—I who have so little—"

"Do not talk of something about which you know nothing," he said, smiling; "and of yourself you certainly know nothing. You are so rare and perfect, my Carmela, that it is I who am unworthy of you; but at least I know the value of what I have won, and I will never cease to treasure it as long as God gives me life."

CHAPTER X.

THE ascent of the Barranca was much more difficult and tedious than its descent. The little *burros* proved altogether unable to carry their burdens up the steep road; and, one after another, the riders made a virtue of necessity, and, dismounting, trudged upward on foot. Only Señor Echeveria remained on his donkey determinately, until the small animal had three times lain down with an air of decision, and could hardly be induced to resume its way even under the blows and objurgations of the driver. Then he, too, resigned himself to the inevitable, and began to mount on foot, declaring the while that *burros* were a snare and delusion, and that if ever he came to the Barranca again, it should be on the back of a large, strong mule.

"I always thought those little animals were too small for the purpose," said Miriam, who, delicate as she was, walked quite vigorously, with the occasional assistance of Don Salvador, and a pause now and then for rest.

Señor Echeveria pointed to a laden troop that came by at that moment, with great sacks of char-

coal piled upon their backs, yet climbing with obedient alacrity up the steep way.

"They do not lie down under *that*," he remarked; "and not one of us—not even myself—equals in weight what is there put upon them. If you had all staid on your animals my wicked one would not have behaved so badly."

"It was impossible," said Miriam. "I would rather drop down with fatigue than hear that poor creature groaning under me in the most heart-rending manner."

"The señorita has a tender heart," observed Don Salvador. "Our poor *burros* do not often obtain so much consideration. But larger animals would certainly be better. When I return here I shall ride a horse."

"A good strong mule for me," repeated Señor Echeveria, as he slowly toiled upward.

But, as it is an ill wind that blows good to no one, the necessity for walking, and the absorption of each one in his own fatigue, resulted in the fact that Lestrangle and Carmela were altogether unnoticed; and that as they climbed together up the long, winding way, its very steepness appeared delightful to them; for did it not offer opportunity for helping and being helped? Were they not able to linger in many a beautiful spot, to let its beauty mingle with and forever remain associ-

ated with their happiness? And did not the very paving stones of the road become transformed for them into that famous primrose path of which we have all heard?

Such happiness is, however, in its very nature among the most brief and evanescent things of life. Its perfect duration is short with everyone, but it was particularly short with Carmela; for before the end of the Barranca was reached, the first faint cloud had fallen over it. They had paused for a few minutes to rest and admire the wildly picturesque scene around them—the great cliffs rising, as it seemed, to the very sky overhead; the masses of rock about the road draped with luxuriant verdure, a flashing spring pouring its waters out of them; and far below the high, curbed way, the stream from the falls rushing tumultuously over its boulder-strewn bed. It was a picture that Carmela never forgot. She glanced up at the turquoise sky, that looked so far away from this deep earth-rift, and felt as if the smile of Heaven sank into her heart.

“Of what are you thinking, my Carmelita?” asked Lestrangle, who caught the glance and the expression on her face. “You look like your picture. After all, I have succeeded with it pretty well. But I do not fancy that expression on your face; it seems to set you too far away from me.

At that moment you had wandered into some high region where I cannot follow you."

She looked at him with a sweet and tender smile. "I was only thinking," she said, "how good God is to give us so much happiness; and how grateful I am to him. You can surely follow me there?"

"Not altogether," he answered. "I prefer to think that this happiness has come to us out of our own hearts, rather than from Heaven. Fate is within us, sweet one; and we can make our lives what we will, if we resolve to do so."

"Not without the blessing of God," she said, a little startled.

Lestrangle checked the answer that trembled on his lips. There was no need to let her know how little belief he possessed in God or in His blessing. He had instinctive knowledge that his vague agnosticism would seem as terrible to this Mexican girl, bred in traditions of the most ardent faith, as if he absolutely denied the possibility of all that she held so dear. Consequently, he took refuge in a lover-like evasion.

"Could that blessing or any other be denied to you?" he said. "You are made for all blessings—to bestow as well as to obtain them. And how can I be grateful enough for the blessings you

have bestowed on me—your gentle heart and this tender hand?”

“The heart, yes,” she answered, smiling. “That is yours forever. But the hand is not mine to give. It belongs to my parents, and it is of them you must ask it.”

“By Jove!” said Lestrangle, under his breath. It was characteristic of the man that he had not given a thought to this practical necessity. To make love under the influence of the most exquisite eyes in the world, and amid the most romantic surroundings, was one thing, and to go in cold blood to talk of matrimony to prosaic parents was quite another. He shrank from the last as perhaps only a man of his temperament does shrink,—a man to whom love-making is delightful, but the consequences of love-making obnoxious. He knew, however, that it was absolutely necessary. Mexican customs are those of the Old World, and permit no trifling on this subject. And even while he felt the necessity to be most disagreeable, he also felt that Carmela was fully worth it. Had the power been given him, he would not at this moment have wished unsaid the words uttered under the great tree down by the rushing river; but no one could prophesy how soon such a moment might come.

“I prefer to think,” he said, after an instant’s

hesitation, "that the hand is as much your gift as the heart ; only it is a gift that must be endorsed by the powers that be. Well, I hope we shall have no difficulty with them. I do not anticipate any. And this being so, I wish it were possible to keep what only concerns ourselves to ourselves a little longer. Can we not enjoy our happiness for a while without admitting others to share it with us?"

"What do you mean?" she asked, with a glance of surprise. "Do you mean that we should keep it—secret?"

"Secret—well, that is hardly the word. I mean simply that when others are admitted to the knowledge of what now belongs only to ourselves, its first delicate aroma will be gone. And I should like to keep that as long as possible."

"Why should it be gone?" asked Carmela, with a puzzled expression. "It seems to me that it should rather add to our happiness to have the blessing of parents and friends, and above all the blessing of God. I could not be happy if I did not go to Padre Agustin at once."

"Then go, by all means. But what will you do if he tells you that it is your duty to have nothing to say to a heretic like me?"

"He will never tell me that!" she cried,

quickly ; but a shadow, as of possible fear and trouble, fell over her face and darkened her eyes. "Was not my father a stranger, an American, like you? And did not my mother marry him with the blessing of the Church?"

"Unless I have been misinformed," he said, "your father went through the form of embracing your mother's religion before he was allowed to marry her. But that I cannot do. You must take me as I am, my Carmela."

"But you are not a Protestant," she said, imploringly. "You have told me so."

"Not in the sense of belonging to any sect, but in the sense of not acknowledging the authority of your Church—yes. And what does that matter? I shall never trouble a faith so beautiful, so poetical as yours. I object to only one thing in it: the intrusion of the priest into one's private affairs. What on earth has Padre Agustin to do with you and me?"

A chill struck to her heart. Passion-blinded as she was, a sense of the irreconcilable difference between her lover and herself on this point seemed for a moment to overcome her. Le-strange saw from the expression of her face that he had shocked her deeply ; and, repenting himself, he remarked quickly :

"But that is only the way in which the matter

appears to me. With you, I know well it is different. Go, then, to twenty padres if you like ; and so long as they do not bid you separate yourself from me, I am content."

"I should not heed any one who bade me do that," she said, passionately.

And then there was a minute or two of lover-like rhapsody before they resumed their upward way after the rest of the party.

But this brief conversation struck a note which made both of them less happy than they had been before. The thought of interfering parents and priest was more odious to Lestrangle than can well be expressed. Not that he had any intention of trifling with Carmela, but that his peculiar temperament made him desire to enjoy the delicate romance of passion undisturbed by prosaic considerations ; while to Carmela herself there was a shadow over the brightness of the hour in the thought that, for the first time in her life, inclination and conscience might be arrayed against each other.

Still "the light that never was on land or sea" cast its brief, tender glory over them, as they rode back side by side across the beautiful plain to Atemajac. A soft, rosy twilight was on earth and sky when they found themselves again in Gaudalajara : and as they were about to separate

on the square where they had met in the morning, Lestrangle—who, somewhat to his sister's surprise, had declined Señor Echeveria's cordial invitation to supper—whispered to Carmela :

“ I will see you early to-morrow, and will speak to your parents, since you think it best. Meanwhile, follow the dictates of your heart in all respects.”

She understood that this meant she might speak to them herself if she desired ; and, with a soft smile from her eyes, they parted.

Miss Lestrangle was not surprised that her brother was very taciturn as they walked toward their lodgings. Such silent moods were generally the result of anything which had stimulated him, and he had certainly seemed to enjoy the day very much.

“ It has been an excursion well worth making,” she said, when they finally ascended to their comfortable sitting-room, and she sank—more tired than she had imagined herself to be—on a couch ; “ but I should not care to make it again in the same manner. Walking down the Barranca was sufficiently easy, but climbing upward those five miles was very fatiguing. I fear I shall feel it very much.”

“ I wish we had never gone, Miriam ! ” said the young man.

He had flung himself into an arm-chair, and sat facing her in the lamp-light, his fair hair clinging in damp disorder to his brow, and his eyes full of gloom.

"Oh, I do not!" she said, quickly. "It was beautiful—most beautiful!—and I would not have missed it on any account. Do not fear but that my fatigue will soon pass."

"I was not thinking of that," he responded, truthfully. "I was thinking—I have made a fool of myself, Miriam; and you might as well know it at once."

"With Carmela, I suppose?" said Miriam, calmly. "I have been expecting that: and I confess it does not strike me as very important. The question is, have you made a fool of her also?"

"You are certainly very sympathetic," he observed, coloring angrily. "I am sorry to say that from your point of view, I *have* made a fool of her. She loves me, and I am to propose to her parents for her to-morrow."

Miss Lestrangle looked at the speaker for a moment with a surprise almost amounting to indignation. Then: "What do you mean by such folly, Arthur?" she asked. "You know that you will never marry this girl. You fancy yourself in love with her now because she is

charming and you have nothing else to interest you ; but that will not last two weeks after you have left Mexico. She does not really suit you in the least ; but if she did, you could not marry her. She has no fortune, you have not enough for your own needs, and Aunt Elinor will never consent."

"I am not dependent upon Aunt Elinor," said Mr. Lestrangle, hastily. "If she chooses to make me her heir, well and good. If not, I have my art to fall back upon. I shall certainly marry Carmela, now that I have gone so far. But I acknowledge that I should have been wiser if I had—waited."

"It is the old story," returned Miriam. "From your boyhood you have never denied yourself anything on which your fancy was set, and of course the temptation to make love to Carmela, was more than you could resist. I have dreaded it all along, but I hoped that a wholesome fear of entanglement might hold you in check for once. You will break this girl's heart, and that will be the end of it,—for *she* has a heart to break ! I wish to Heaven we had never come here ! "

"You certainly have a genius for saying disagreeable things," replied the young man, with not unnatural exasperation. "Have I not told

you that I mean to marry Carmela, even if I must sacrifice my prospects in doing so? Does that look as if I were going to break her heart? I regret my folly in having spoken just now; but having done so, I shall abide by the consequences."

"What a lover-like spirit!" said Miss Le-strange, sarcastically. It must be owned that she was very provoking, as well as much provoked. "If it is common for men to feel in this manner after they have been accepted, God save me from ever excepting one! Well, for Carmela's sake, I hope her parents will refuse you. Happily you are not much of a *parti*, if your expectations from Aunt Elinor are left out—as they must be in this case."

"I do not imagine that your kind wish is likely to be gratified," he said, with offended dignity.

"I am afraid not," she admitted, with a sigh. "But of this I am sure—if they are wise enough to refuse, it will be the best and happiest ending for Carmela."

CHAPTER XI.

MIRIAM was right ; but there was to be no such short, sharp ending of her romance for Carmela. Señor Echeveria was very doubtful of the answer to be given to Lestrangle's proposal, but he naturally left the decision to his wife ; and she, touched by the remembrance of her own young romance, and dazzled by what she conceived to be the position and prospects of the suitor, finally gave her consent—subject to the condition that she be assured of the consent of Lestrangle's parents, both of whom were living.

“ That is not considered necessary in our country,” he remarked ; “ but you shall be gratified as soon as possible. My parents are not likely to refuse their consent to anything that is for my happiness.”

“ It is necessary that I should be assured on this point,” Señora Echeveria explained ; “ because you are not going to live in Mexico, like Carmela's father. No one thought of asking the consent of his family, as they were so far away, and he made himself one of us. But you—if you take the poor child to your country, she will be in the midst of

strangers, and it will be sad if they are not also friends."

"No one could see Carmela without becoming her friend," he replied, enthusiastically. "Do not fear that she will not win every one by one glance of her eyes."

"Then," continued the señora, "there is the difference of religion. If it were possible for you to become a Catholic—"

The young man shook his head decidedly. "That is quite impossible," he said. "You must be satisfied with my promise never to interfere with Carmela's religion. I admire it in her, but that I should embrace it is out of the question."

"I do not know what Padre Agustin will say," murmured the señora, dubiously.

"Does it matter what he says?" inquired the suitor, rather haughtily. "You surely will not allow him to dictate what you shall do with regard to your own daughter? That would be priestly tyranny indeed."

"You do not understand," said Señora Echeveria, with dignity. "Our priests are not only our spiritual advisers, but our best and most intimate friends. Padre Agustin has been Carmela's director since her childhood; no one feels a deeper interest in her, and no one has a better right to speak about anything which concerns her

especially anything so important and so opposed to our ideas as marriage with one of another faith."

"And if Padre Agustin opposes such a marriage, am I to understand that you will reconsider your consent?" asked Lestrangle, who felt all his inherited Protestantism stirring in him at this moment.

It was a difficult question for Señora Echeveria to answer. She hesitated slightly, and then said: "I have given my consent on certain conditions, Señor; and I shall hope that you on your part will do all that is possible to reconcile our spiritual authorities to such a marriage."

"I will do anything short of promising to become a Catholic myself," he replied, eagerly.

But after he was gone the señora began to consider within herself that perhaps she had been rash in giving even the modified consent which had been drawn from her, without first consulting Padre Agustin. On the principle of repairing a fault without delay, she therefore flung her black mantle over her head and went forth at once to seek him.

Padre Agustin knew human nature and the general course of human events too well to be surprised at the tale which she had to tell. He listened gravely, but with a look of regret and concern in his dark eyes.

"I think," he said, finally, "since you wish me to speak frankly, that it is a terrible thing you have agreed to do—to give your daughter to a stranger of whom you know nothing save that he is a man utterly without Christian faith."

"Not without *Christian* faith!" demurred Señora Echeveria: "though he is not a Catholic."

The Father made a gesture which signified that the distinction was unimportant. "He is not even a Christian in the sense in which you use the term," he said. "Many things come to my ears. Among them I have heard that Señor Le-strange advocates a refined infidelity, which, by treating the Christian faith as a beautiful myth that human reason has outgrown, is more dangerous than the violent atheism with which we are familiar."

"I did not know that," answered the señora, much shocked. "He has always seemed so liberal and so full of admiration for everything Catholic, that I liked him better and trusted him more because he acknowledged that he had no faith in Protestantism."

"Unfortunately, he has no faith in anything except human reason," said the priest. "He will no doubt utter many fine sentiments, and honestly mean them; but the fact remains that there is

no foundation to build upon in a man who has no divine faith. At least I should be sorry to put into his hands the happiness of one dear to me, and, far more than that, the power to weaken and perhaps destroy her faith."

"But what am I to do, Father?" asked the poor lady, who wished now most heartily that she had sought counsel before committing herself. "Carmela loves him, and I—I have promised to let her marry him."

"Carmela is young and foolish, but she is too good a child not to submit to your wishes in this matter," said the Father. "It is you who are to blame for promising without consideration to give your daughter to this man. Is it possible that you have made no conditions with him?"

"Oh, yes!" she replied. "I have made the condition of his parents' consent, and that he shall never interfere with Carmela's religion."

Padre Agustin shrugged his shoulders. "The last amounts to nothing," he said. "His interference with Carmela's religion will be of too subtle a character to be guarded against. And you forget that there may be other souls besides hers to be considered. How will you guard a man's children from the effects of his unbelief?"

"There are promises which he must make," observed the señora, weakly.

“What promises will bind a man who acknowledges no power from which such promises derive force? He will break them if it pleases him; and should indifference or a sense of honor induce him to keep them, the influence of his example and the associations of his life must have none the less effect upon young minds and hearts.”

“*Madre de Dios*,” said the señora, in a whisper to herself, “what have I done! I see that I have acted like a fool, Father,” she added aloud. “Only tell me now what I can do. It will go hard with me to break my poor Carmela’s heart, but if it must be done to save her soul—”

“We will not break Carmela’s heart,” replied the priest, with a grave, sweet smile. “Send her to me, and I promise you that she will do all that you ask. What you must ask is this: that she will go away from Guadalajara for the present, and see no more of this young man until you are satisfied whether it is well for her to marry him. The fact that you have demanded the consent of his parents will give you a good reason for asking this separation. Until you have that, it is certainly not well that Carmela should be indulging a sentiment destined perhaps to disappointment.”

“Señor Lestrangle says that he is perfectly cer-

tain of the consent of his parents," remarked Señora Echeveria, in a despondent tone.

"Nothing is certain until it is accomplished," the good priest replied. "You cannot risk your daughter's happiness on such an assertion. You must send her away for the present. The question is, where?"

"That is easily answered," said the señora, more cheerfully; for she felt that to send Carmela away at present would be the greatest possible relief. "She has long been promising a visit to her Aunt Gonzalez. She shall go at once. It is, you know, near Etzatlau that my sister lives. That is far enough away?"

"It will do," returned the father. "And now that this point is settled, go, my friend, and send Carmela to me."

A little later his heart was touched by Carmela's aspect when she appeared. Beautiful as she had been before, it was the beauty of an unawakened nature; but now, under the powerful influence of the passion that had wrought its spell upon her, she seemed transformed. The liquid eyes were radiant with a new light, the tender lips had gained a joyous curve, and there was that pervading yet indefinable change which only great emotion can produce, and which is

seen in its extremest form in organizations sensitive alike to pleasure and to pain.

"She will not look like this when she has heard what I have to say to her," thought the priest, with a pang of pity. But he knew the temper of the soul which he had to deal with; and so, with the calmness of the surgeon who wounds to heal, he spoke.

"My child," he said, gently, "I am sorry to hear the news which your mother has brought me. I did not think that you would be so carried away by the influence of feeling as to promise, without consideration or condition, to marry a man who has no Christian faith."

Something of a look of penitence crept into Carmela's eyes as she lifted them to his face, but not enough to dim the radiance of her happiness.

"It was wrong," she said, in a low voice. "I know that. But he is very good, though, unhappily, he has not a faith like ours. I am sure of that, Father. And I—I love him very much. So I did not think of consideration or delay before telling him so."

"That would have been natural enough in another," the Father went on; "but in you I expected more thought of what might be pleasing to God, rather than such prompt yielding to

human passion. Do not misunderstand me, my child. It is a natural emotion of the heart, which God blesses when it is in accordance with His will and His laws; but Christian people, before giving themselves up to its dominion, strive to learn what is His will."

Her glance sank under what she felt to be a well-deserved rebuke. There was a moment's pause, and then she said, slowly: "Surely it is not too late to do that now."

"It is certainly not too late," was the reply. "But if this proposed marriage should prove to be *not* according to God's will, are you able to resign it?"

The knife went deep then. The dark eyes sprang wide open with a startled look of absolute agony. It was this look which the priest answered.

"We cannot deceive God," he said, impressively. "Remember that. To seek to know His will, and be fixed meanwhile in the determination to follow our own, is nothing but a mockery. Many people deceive themselves in this manner; but I do not wish you to do so. Therefore I put the possible result plainly before you. It is useless to seek to know His will unless we are prepared to follow it when it is made known. Are you prepared? Are you ready to

resign your heart's wish if God demands it of you?"

"How can I say?" she answered, with a gasp. "I have often thought that I would take nothing which I was not sure was according to God's will; but now—O Father, now I am not sure! When you put it so plainly, I see that I am not ready to resign what has become my life. I would far rather die!"

"There are many times in life when we would rather die than make a painful sacrifice," said the Father, calmly; "but in such cases death is not what God asks of us. My child, passion has taken too strong hold upon you, and on such passion God's blessing cannot rest. There is but one remedy. Ask of Him the strength to bend your will to His. It may be that He will not demand this sacrifice of you; but I warn you that unless you are prepared to make it if necessary, there is no good in seeking to know His will. Better at once follow the dictates of undisciplined human passion."

The penetrating voice sank deep into Carmela's heart, and seemed for the moment to still the passion of which he spoke. With that voice were associated all the deep, spiritual feeling, and all the high spiritual aspirations of her life. Heretofore she had followed eagerly where its

counsels led ; but now, for the first time, nature drew back. Noble was the height toward which the well-known accents invited her ; but so steep and terrible the road thither that the soul, in the thralldom of love's enchantment, shrank shuddering before it. Yet even in this moment the higher nature responded in some sort to the call made upon it.

"I do not wish to do that," she said, in a low, broken voice. "I wish to know God's will and to follow it—if I can. Pity me, Father, for I am so weak that I dare not absolutely say that I will."

"God will enable you to do it if there be need," said the gentle yet commanding tones. "Have no fear of that. Go to Him with the confidence of a child ; ask Him to make His will clear to you, and to give you the strength to follow it. You will do this?"

"Yes," she answered. "All that you say I will do as well as I am able."

"Then, as a proof that you mean what you have said to Him, submit at once and without a murmur to your mother's wishes. She will ask of you to go away until it is made plain whether or not this marriage is for your best interests. You will do this also?"

"I shall have no alternative," she replied, with paling lips—for this was her first intimation of

the separation from her lover which impended over her.

“I did not mean that you had any alternative save obedience,” said Padre Agustin; “but there is a wide difference in the manner of obedience. I am speaking of the spirit in which you may accept what I know to be painful to you. I ask you to accept it by a voluntary act of the will, submitting not only to your mother’s wishes, but to whatever God may ordain for you in this matter. Are you able to do this?”

There was a short silence and a sharp struggle before she could answer, with tears that would not be restrained:

“I will try to do so.”

CHAPTER XII.

GREAT was Lestrangle's indignation when he heard Señora Echeveria's decision with regard to Carmela. It seemed to him nothing less than an outrage that their association should be ended, and the pleasure of love-making cut short just when it had reached its most agreeable stage. But the expression of these sentiments had no effect upon the señora. She was placid but firm.

"My daughter's happiness is very dear to me, Señor," she said; "and I cannot permit it to be trifled with. She must go away until it is decided whether or not she is to marry you. Moreover, it is the custom of our country that after a lover has declared his feelings—"

"He is banished from the house," interposed Lestrangle. "Yes, I know; but you must allow me to observe that it is a barbarous custom."

"It may be that it appears so to you," said the señora, with dignity; "but since it is our custom, you must not be surprised if I follow it—at least to the extent of separating Carmela and yourself until you have obtained the consent of your parents to your marriage."

"I have assured you," he remarked, "that this consent is simply a form. You may consider it already obtained."

"I cannot do that," she replied; "but since you are so certain of obtaining it, you should not find the separation which I require very hard to bear."

"I find it not only hard, but cruel and unnecessary," he said, with an energy altogether strange to his usual languid manner. If Miriam had been present she would have reflected that the only thing which, from his boyhood, had ever roused Arthur to this energy, had been the crossing of a fancy or caprice.

"I am sorry that you find it so," answered the señora, with more kindness than the tone of the speech merited: for she said to herself that she could not find fault with the young man for being very much in love with Carmela. "It is, however impossible for me to reconsider what I have decided upon."

"What do *you* say to this, Carmela?" asked Lestrangle, turning to the girl, who had sat pale and silent during the conversation.

She lifted her eyes at his appeal, and the deep pain in them went to his heart. A sudden conviction came to him that his own aversion to the proposed separation was but a faint sentiment

compared to what she was suffering. The realization was brief ; for, like all egotists, the only thing of which he had any keen or lasting impression was that which he felt himself. But with the gaze of those sad eyes upon him, he could not for the moment think of anything but what they revealed.

"I am sorry that my mother thinks it necessary," Carmela replied, in her low, sweet voice ; "but since it is her wish, we can only submit to it. God will perhaps bring us together again."

"*I will do that,*" said Lestrangle, passionately : for her look stirred all that was deepest in his nature. "Nothing but your own wishes shall come between us in any lasting sense. I promise you that. Only tell me," he added, quickly, speaking in English, partly on the impulse of the moment, partly because Señora Echeveria had no knowledge of the language, "is it *necessary* to submit to this tyrannical separation?"

"It is certainly necessary that I should obey my mother," the young girl answered in the same language ; for she knew that if she replied in Spanish, he would believe she had spoken for her mother's ears.

"And when do you go?" he asked.

Carmela turned to her mother. "He wishes to know when I am going," she said.

"To-morrow," answered the señora. "There is no reason for delay. This afternoon I will accompany her to pay a farewell visit to your sister; and after that I think it is best that you should not meet again. It will only be an unnecessary pain."

Lestranger uttered no remonstrance against this. He felt, by the change in Señora Echeveria's tone and manner, that a stronger will than hers was arrayed against him, and that further resistance was useless. "It is the priest, of course?" he said to himself, bitterly. And as he left the house, he swore an oath in his heart that not all the priests in Mexico should separate Carmela and himself—for opposition was the one touch requisite to settle into obstinacy his wavering desires.

In the afternoon Señora Echeveria and Carmela went, according to the promise of the former, to see Miss Lestranger; Carmela with a faint, pathetic attempt to appear cheerful—for Padre Agustin had said to her, "Try to do what is required of you with good-will and a good grace, not in a martyr spirit." But the look which Miriam called nun-like—the look, that is, of renunciation—was on her face, despite all her efforts to the contrary; and the dark eyes had an expression of steady, abiding pain.

"And so you are going away, my dear?" said Miss Lestrangle, taking her hand after they sat down. "I am very sorry, I assure you. Your companionship has been a great pleasure to me, and I shall miss you sadly."

Tears sprang into Carmela's eyes and made them liquid with moisture as she raised them to the speaker's face. "You have been very kind to me," she replied, simply. "I, too, am sorry that we must part. But my mother thinks it necessary for me to go."

"It may seem strange to you that I am sending her away," said Señora Echeveria; "but, until things are quite settled, it seems to me best."

"Yes, it *is* best," Miriam answered, with some unconscious emphasis. "I would not have Carmela suffer one pang through Arthur's fault; and I think you are right to guard against the possibility of such a thing."

The señora looked at her wistfully. Despite all that Padre Agustin had said, the soft-hearted woman could not wish that Carmela's young romance should be shattered; and Miriam's words made her think, for the first time, that the parental consent she had demanded was not so certain as Lestrangle declared it to be. She hesitated a moment, then said to her daughter:

"Go to the other end of the room, dear. I wish to speak a few words to the señorita."

Obediently as a child Carmela went, and, passing behind a partly drawn curtain—hung across the end of the room to screen from sight the large easel on which her picture rested,—found herself in the presence of Arthur Lestrangle, who, flung listlessly in the depths of a large chair, was gazing moodily out of the window. He sprang up when he saw her, with a sudden light flashing into his eyes.

"What! is it you?" he cried. "But this is too good! I was just debating with myself whether I would appear at your visit; for to see you in the presence of your mother is worse than not to see you at all. And now you have come to me alone! It is more than I hoped for."

"I did not know that you were here," she answered. "I was sent away. Mamma is speaking to your sister, and I came for a last look at the picture."

"And instead you find me. Is not that better? Sit down in this chair, and let me look at you and talk to you once more in peace."

"Perhaps I should tell mamma that you are here?" she said, hesitating a little.

"Has she forbidden you to see or speak to me, Carmela?"

"No, oh no!"

"Then be quiet. Is there anything strange in our being together? Have we not been together often before? What horrible nonsense and cruel folly all this separation is! It enrages me beyond measure,—enrages me because I have no power to prevent it. O my Carmela! when once you are mine—and mine you shall be as surely as the sun shines in heaven—they will never have an opportunity to interfere with us again. If you had but heeded me, and we had said nothing of what concerned only ourselves, what happy hours we might have had together here, instead of being torn apart in this manner!"

She shook her head slightly, as she looked at him with gentle, pathetic eyes. "It is better to suffer than to do wrong," she answered. "We could not have been happy without the blessing of God, and that blessing could not have rested on wilful concealment."

"We do not look at these things in the same way," he said; "but what is done is done, and I will not blame you now. For you, too, suffer,—not as much as I, for you have your piety to console you; but still you suffer."

She smiled a faint, pathetic smile, more expressive than tears. "Yes, I suffer," she replied, quietly; "and what you call my piety does not

console me as it ought to do. But if we bear our suffering patiently, God will perhaps end it for us. That is my hope."

"Have hope in *me*," he whispered, drawing her quickly toward him. "I have promised you that nothing shall come between us, and I repeat that promise again. Nothing, my Carmela,—nothing! Not all the parents or priests in Mexico shall keep us apart. They could not send you so far that I would not follow you, if need be. And there is nothing I would not throw to the winds, if by doing so I could secure you."

She looked at him gratefully, too deeply touched by his passion to doubt or criticise. Surely such devotion as this was worth suffering for. Nay, suffering itself took another character and became happiness when it was endured for one so deeply loved, and supported by ardent faith in that beloved one.

Meanwhile Señora Echeveria, unheeding the soft murmur of voices at the other end of the room, was saying to Miss Lestrangle,

"You will forgive me if I ask you a frank question. Do you think that your parents will refuse their consent to the marriage of your brother with my Carmela?"

"My parents—oh, no doubt they will consent if Arthur really wishes it," Miriam answered.

"But"—she paused a moment, and then went on, with a sudden impulse of confidence—"I feel as if I must tell you that the greatest danger is in Arthur himself. He is very much in love with Carmela now, and he means all that he says to you and to her. But he is capricious and changeable in the extreme. He may change altogether in his feelings. So it is best that Carmela should be separated from him. The separation will test his affection, and it may spare her some pangs should that affection not bear the test."

The señora shook her head. "You do not know Carmela," she said. "Nothing, I fear, can spare her now. And obstacles seem to increase. Forgive me, Señorita, if I say that I wish your brother had never come to Mexico."

"So do I, with all my heart," returned Miriam. "I assure you my feeling is all with you in this matter. I would do anything to spare Carmela pain. It may be that I wrong Arthur—that he will be more constant than I think to this affection. We can only hope so—now."

"I do not know what to hope," said the señora, mournfully. "It is not a marriage I would choose for Carmela. I do not think she would be happy in your country; and—and I am told that your brother has no faith, no religion of any kind."

"I am afraid that is true," Miriam admitted,

gravely ; "but with us there are many men—good and well-intentioned—who have no faith, as you understand faith. They were never taught any positive religion, and so they follow the fashion of the time, and doubt everything. Arthur is one of them. I cannot deny that. But his form of easy-going unbelief is so common that we think little of it."

"We think much of any unbelief," said Señora Echeveria. "I see no hope in this matter for my poor Carmela. She seems doomed to unhappiness ; for how can I allow her to marry one who has no certainty of himself and no belief in God ? Even if your parents consent—"

"Our parents will leave Arthur to do as he pleases," interrupted Miss Lestrangle ; "but there is another person who has much power over him. This is a wealthy aunt, who has been very generous to him, and who, we have every reason to believe, will make him her heir. If she opposes such a marriage he will never persevere. I am sure of that. He does not think so himself. He believes now that he will throw away a fortune for Carmela ; but I know that he never will. I tell you these things, Señora, in order that you may be prepared, should what I fear come to pass ; and that you may do what seems to you best for your daughter's happiness."

"I am grateful to you for your frankness," said the señora, gravely. "I shall not forget it. I see that the separation between your brother and Carmela is even more necessary, more imperative, than I supposed. And there must be no delay in it. So now it is time for us to go. Where is Carmela?"

Miriam pointed toward the curtained recess. "She is there—with Arthur," she answered. "They have had their farewell. Do not grudge them that. When they meet again all things will be different."

"If I can prevent it, they shall never meet again," said the mother, rising resolutely.

CHAPTER XIII.

A MONTH had passed since Carmela and Lestrangle parted, when the *diligencia* from Guadalajara set down in the plaza of Ahualulco—a small town lying in the midst of a beautiful mountain-encircled valley—a very tired, very dusty, and very cross young man. Twenty leagues in a Mexican *diligencia* is calculated to ruffle the amiability of any one short of an angel; and no one ever credited Arthur Lestrangle with angelic qualities. He had followed an impulse in starting on this journey; but it is safe to say that if he had imagined how disagreeable it would prove, he would have found some other way of reaching Carmela, or else not have reached her at all. He said this to himself more than once during the day; and now that he was near the end of the journey, physical discomfort had come to a point which rendered him almost incapable of any other feeling than that of consciousness of it.

He was covered with dust to a degree which would have made recognition difficult, and aching in every joint from the terrible jolting of the vehicle, as he followed a small boy who

agreed to guide him to the principal *meson*.* This proved to be a very indifferent place; but water at least was attainable, and after copious ablutions and a change of clothing he was sufficiently revived to make inquiries concerning the cousin with whom Carmela was at present staying, as he had learned from one of the Echeveria boys. There was no difficulty in obtaining a direction to the house. Evidently the Señora Andrea Rodriguez was a person of importance and well known.

As he went into the street again—a long, Oriental-like vista of low, flat houses bounding a white, dusty road, and ending in a glimpse of noble mountain forms, which were already draped in the soft tints of approaching sunset—his attention was attracted by the musical clamor of the bells in the tall, graceful church-tower, that made a landmark for miles, as it rose out of the midst of tropical verdure in the centre of the lovely valley. They were calling to some service, for from all directions people were hastening towards the church; and with a thought that he might see Carmela there, Lestrangle followed, ascended the steps of the platform on which the church and *curato*†—the last a portion of

* Inn.

† Residence of the *cura*.

former Franciscan monastery—stand, and entered the wide-open doors.

It was a scene such as he had witnessed often in Mexican churches the poetry and beauty of which always touched the artistic side of his nature afresh each time that he saw it. A long and lofty nave rose overhead into a series of arches and frescoed domes, and ended at the farther extremity in a splendid high altar, all white and gold, where the Most Holy Sacrament was throned amid starry lights. The floor was covered with kneeling forms, while a surpliced priest stood in the pulpit, beads in hand, and led the Rosary. The response was like the murmur of many waters; and at the end of each decade the organ rolled in, and a chorus of voices rose in a familiar chant, in which the people joined with stirring effect

Lestrangle sat down on a bench near the door, and began to consider how he could possibly hope to discover Carmela amid the multitude of feminine forms present, all disguised alike in the shrouding folds of *rebosas* and shawls. The only hope was that she might see him in passing out. He waited, therefore, through the Rosary, the meditation which followed, the Benediction which ended the service; and kept his position as the throng passed out, unheeding the many

curious glances cast upon him. But he was not rewarded by a glimpse of any one resembling Carmela. Presently he found himself left in a building almost entirely empty, save for a few forms still kneeling at the upper end near the altar. He rose and slowly strolled up the long nave, stood for a few minutes at the sanctuary rail, examining the details of the richly ornamented altar: and then, turning around, was suddenly startled by the gaze of a pair of dark eyes that, in mingled astonishment and delight, were looking at him out of a face closely shaded by the folds of a black mantle. It was Carmela herself who was kneeling on the pavement before him.

He made a quick movement toward her, but she checked it by a gesture, bent her head for a moment, blessed herself in the rapid Spanish fashion, and then, rising, walked before him toward a side door that opened on a corridor that ran between the church and the *patio* of the *curato*, once the cloister of the monastery.

Here she paused, and, turning towards him, held out her hand with a gesture full of tenderness and grace. Her eyes were shining with soft radiance, her lips were smiling. It was a transfigured face from that of the pale girl who a few minutes before had been kneeling before the Mother of Sorrows.

"This is a great happiness," she said, simply. "How do you come here?"

"Did I not tell you that wherever you went I would follow?" he answered. "Did you think I did not mean it? My Carmela, I would cross Mexico to see you looking at me as you are looking now! One glimpse of you is enough to reward one for any hardship." And at the moment he honestly forgot the hardships of the *diligencia*.

"But why have you come?" she asked. "Have you anything to tell me? Has my mother consented, perhaps?"

"I have not seen your mother," he replied; "although I must see her when I return to Guadalajara. I have had letters from home, and I came to you first, because I knew that if I went to her I should be forbidden to see you; and I was determined to see you before I went away."

The brief radiance faded out of her face as quickly as it had come into it. She knew now what blow was impending; but she uttered no cry or exclamation. She looked at him steadily, and her voice was lower than before, as she said, "Your parents have, then, refused their consent?"

"It was an absurd folly, the form of asking their consent," he answered, pulling viciously at the ends of his mustache. "I want to explain

it all to you—but this is no place. Can I not see you in the house where you are staying?”

“Yes,” she replied. “My cousin is kind: she will not object. But you will have no opportunity to speak to me alone. Can you not tell me now whatever it is necessary for me to know?”

“No; I cannot expose you to remark by keeping you here,” he answered. “We can speak English if need be; there is that resource. Can I accompany you? I suppose not.”

She shook her head. “I will go,” she said, “and prepare my cousin. Come within half an hour. She will receive you, I am sure.”

“Go, then; but try to find some means to speak to me alone. I have much to say to you.”

“I will tell Andrea frankly what we wish,” she said. “I think that she will help us; for surely there can be no harm in exchanging a few words before we part.”

Señora Rodriguez justified Carmela's opinion. She was a young widow, able to feel with youth, and altogether independent in her own house. She had brought Carmela from her mother's *hacienda* to be a companion to her, and she was full of sympathy for the gentle creature who bore the enforced separation from her lover so uncomplainingly. She had noticed Lestrangle as she passed out of the church with the rest of the

congregation, and had then shrewdly suspected who this remarkable-looking stranger might be. It was therefore no surprise to her when Carmela came in with her story.

"I knew who he was, Carmelita, as soon as I saw him," she observed. "He is handsome as an angel, and he must love you passionately to come so far to seek you. I am glad that you bade him come here. Rest assured I will receive him with pleasure."

"You are very kind," returned Carmela, gratefully. "I knew that you would be. Do not think," she added quickly, "that I wish to do anything clandestine or contrary to my mother's wishes. But she has not forbidden our marriage; on the contrary, she consented, if Arthur's parents were willing. What he has now come to tell me is their decision."

"And it must be good," said the señora, hopefully, "or else he would not have come."

"I think it is not good," answered Carmela. "But he wishes to tell me, and I wish to know what it is. Then it will be necessary for us to part again—I know not for how long."

"Poor little one!" said the kind hearted lady, stroking her cheek gently. "You shall not be disturbed in seeing him. I promise you that."

So Lestrangle found Fate much kinder to him

than he deserved when he made his appearance at Señora Rodriguez' door. The señora herself—a tall, dark-eyed, dark-haired woman—welcomed him cordially, and bade him consider the house his own. It was a pleasant, picturesque house, though without the grace and beauty of the Guadalajara dwellings. Around a court laid out in flower beds, and filled with an almost endless variety of flowers and shrubs, ran a broad, brick-paved corridor; its roof, of bamboo and tiles, supported by large white pillars, shading the different apartments that opened upon it.

Into one of these apartments—a long room, with floor also brick-paved, though covered partly with mats of native manufacture, and ceiling of mesquite beams—Mr. Lestrangle was introduced. Here Carmela joined him; and after a few minutes spent in exchanging the usual courtesies of welcome, Señora Rodriguez considerably passed out and left the two together.

“What is it?” asked the girl quickly, as soon as they were alone. “Do not keep me waiting longer, but tell me the worst at once. Your parents have refused their consent?”

“I repeat again that it was ridiculous to have gone through the form of asking it,” said Lestrangle. “Since it has been asked, they decline to give it, on the ground that my aunt, Mrs. Thorpe,

of whom you have heard me speak, does not approve of such a marriage. Now, the matter rests thus: will your mother think that this woman has the right to interfere and blast our happiness?"

"My mother will certainly think that if your parents refuse to consent, all must be at an end between us," said Carmela, pale and trembling.

"But left to themselves, my parents would never dream of such refusal. They say explicitly that, since I have asked their formal consent, they must decline to give it, solely on the ground that they do not wish to assume the responsibility of marring my prospects in life by alienating my aunt. But this is no reason at all. If I am willing to let Mrs. Thorpe take her fortune and go to—thunder, whose concern is it but mine? What I hope is that your mother will recognize that this constitutes no valid objection."

"Do not hope anything of the kind," said Carmela. "My mother will decide that we must separate. I am sure of it."

"Then I have but one alternative—to return immediately to the States, make my parents understand imperatively how the matter stands, and return with their formal consent. I came here to tell you that I intend doing this. And I know you will trust me implicitly until I return for you, my Carmela!"

She looked at him with all her soul in her tender, beautiful eyes. "I do trust you implicitly," she said. "But remember, if you find it best for you to stay, you must not let any thought of me bring you back. I can better bear the pain of losing you than to think that you might regret losing a fortune for me. You remarked once that you never cared for anything very long. Would it not be terrible, then, if you made a great sacrifice and found out afterwards that you had ceased to care—"

"For *you*?" he cried, in a tone of indignation. "Carmela, how can you venture to say such things to me! Have I deserved it? Have I not followed you here to tell you exactly how matters stand, that you may not be deceived in any particular? I want you to know exactly why I go, and to believe that I will certainly return. If Mrs. Thorpe remains unreasonable and obstinate, I shall simply bid her keep her fortune and give it to whom she will; for not all the fortunes in the world could keep me from you."

"And you will go to my mother and tell her this when you return to Guadalajara?"

"Yes; and if she answers me as you and I both think likely, I shall return at once to the States to arrange matters in person."

"It will be long, long before I see you again," she said, in a whisper full of pain.

"A month perhaps—not more. But that seems long when I think how terrible the last month has been without you. Now that we are together again we must at least indemnify ourselves a little for the separation. You will be glad for me to spend a few days here?"

"Glad!" Color, radiance, life, flashed into her face—and then as quickly faded. "I should be more than glad," she said, "if it were possible, but it is not."

"Perfectly possible," he answered. "This is Friday. I shall remain at least until the next return of the *diligencia* to Guadalajara. That will be on Tuesday. We shall have three days of happiness before we part. And three days are worth something, are they not?"

Poor Carmela! At his words the three days of which he spoke seemed to open before her like a vista of Paradise. But in the same moment she knew that it was a paradise forbidden to her.

"The *diligencia* returns to Guadalajara tomorrow," she said. "You must go in it. If you stayed here I could not see you, and that would be very miserable for us both."

"Not see me! But why, Carmela? Are you

not seeing me now, with your cousin's consent, and is to-morrow different from to-day?"

"It would be different," she answered, "because to-day I have not had a choice. You came without asking my consent, and I had surely a right to see you long enough to learn what our future is to be. But to-morrow—ah, to-morrow would be a pleasure, a happiness taken against the wishes of those whose wishes I am bound to respect. I could not do it, Arthur! No happiness is great enough to buy at the price of wrong-doing. You must go."

A dark cloud came over Lestrangle's face. The three days of which he spoke had been the reward he promised himself for the hardships endured in reaching Carmela. And now to have it suddenly snatched from him—it was no wonder that he felt himself deeply aggrieved and consequently indignant.

"Your scruples," he said, coldly, "seem to me very strained. You would never think of them if you loved me as I love you. Of course if my society would give you no pleasure, you are right in ordering me away."

"Arthur!" The dark eyes filled with hot, quick tears. To be misjudged in this manner, to find no comprehension of her sacrifice, was very hard,—the harder as it was her first experience of

the unreason that goes with selfish love. "There is nothing I would not give," she said, in a low voice, "to be able to spend these three days with you, without feeling that I was doing wrong. But it *would* be wrong, and surely you feel with me that no happiness is worth that."

She looked at him appealingly. It seemed to her impossible that he should not echo that conclusion which, however painful, was so plain and self-evident to her. She did not know in how different a school his soul had been trained. While he might, as an abstract idea, have agreed in the noble lines,

"I could not love thee, dear, so much
Loved I not honor more,"

his conception of honor, when brought to the test, would certainly have proved very wavering, and subject to the dictates of overmastering selfishness.

"In the first place, I deny that it would be wrong," he answered. "Have we not a right to seek our own happiness? But if it *were* wrong, being so small a matter, you would do it if you loved me truly."

Who can tell how sharp a pang words like these can give, save one who has suffered from them? It was not the unjust reproach which

stung Carmela most deeply, but the revelation that he made of himself,—the sudden, shocked realization that there was no response in this nature to her standard of right-doing, no appreciation of that great power of sacrifice which is the keynote to all nobility of character.

“You would wish me to do wrong for your sake?” she said. “I can hardly believe that. But even if it is so, I cannot yield to your wish. We must part to-night ; and if you do not know what it costs me to tell you this, I have no power to make it clear to you.”

An impulse of something like shame stirred him,—partly from the pain which her voice revealed, and partly because, with the quick sensibility to the opinion of others which characterized him, he felt that he had fallen in her esteem.

“Forgive me,” he said. “I have no doubt it costs you much, and I would not wish you to do the least thing that you believe to be wrong for my sake. You would do it for your own if you loved more passionately, because then you would not believe that it was wrong. But I will say no more of it. Since you are resolved, on account of mere scruple, to deny a great happiness to yourself and me, I accept your decision, and I will return to Guadalajara to-morrow. Does this satisfy you?”

"Satisfy me! It breaks my heart!" she said, passionately. "But it must be. We must wait for our happiness until you come back. And if you should never come—"

"That could only be because I was dead. As certainly as I live I shall return. Believe that, my Carmela!"

"It must be as God wills," she said, solemnly. "I try to leave it to Him. If it is His will that you shall return, you will come back. If not—"

"There is no 'If not,'" he interrupted, tenderly. "I shall come back as fast as love and steam can bring me. Never doubt that."

And in this moment she did not doubt it. The bitterness of parting had at least the golden light of hope upon it; and after he was gone, and the pain of indefinite separation had settled upon her like a heavy pall, she whispered to herself amid her tears, "He will come back. I am sure of that."

CHAPTER XIV.

AMONG the words of sad human wisdom, written when the world was younger but not less full of misery than to-day, there are surely none that human experience can echo more than these, that "hope deferred maketh the heart sick." And not the heart only, but the body also, and even the soul. Who is so fortunate as not to have known the hour when words of prayer falter and almost die upon the lips from the stress of this sore sickness, this pervading anguish of hope long deferred in its fulfilment?

Such anguish was pressing upon Carmela, with a weight hard to bear, as she knelt one afternoon in the church of Ahualulco. More than a month had now passed since Lestrangle left Guad-alajara, and no word from him had reached her. For a time she had been sustained by her faith in him, and her conviction that all would be well in the end; but later, as days succeeded days without any sign of his coming, the terrible sickness of hope deferred began to weigh upon her spirit; and in the pale face lifted now so appealingly toward the altar there were piteous lines of

misery,—lines to touch with pity the heart of any one who loved her. If Miriam could have seen her she would have been struck with her likeness to the picture which she had declared to be that of one preparing to tread some difficult path of sacrifice. Only in the pictured face the artist had unconsciously shown the calm of accepted renunciation, while now all the stress of pain and conflict was on the sensitive countenance.

She was alone in the silent church, praying for strength to bear with courage the disappointment that she felt sure awaited her, when a step advancing up the long nave made her turn her head with a quick motion. Perhaps, after all, he had come! But the fluttering heart which made this suggestion sank down again; for it was only Rodolfo, her cousin's oldest son, a boy of about twelve who came toward her.

"The *diligencia* is in," he whispered when he reached her side, "and there is no one for you. I am going now for the mail. Will you wait for me here?"

"No," she answered, rising to her feet. "I will go home. It is not likely that there will be anything for me in the mail; but if—if there should be, you will find me in the *huerta*. I will wait there to hear—that there is nothing."

The boy looked at her with a sympathy beyond

his years. He was a grave, manly little fellow, and full of devotion to his beautiful, gentle cousin. "I will not keep you waiting," he said. "I will come at once and let you know." He was wise enough to know that to give relief from suspense was all that he could do for her.

They parted at the church door—he going toward the post-office, she toward home. Entering the house, she passed across the flowery *patio* and through a door at the farther end, into a *huerta*, a garden full of trees and shrubs, beyond. There were no flowers here, save a luxuriant vine bearing great, purple, trumpet-shaped blossoms ; which covered one side of the enclosing wall, and only trees useful for the fruits they bore. Of these, however, there was a great variety—orange-trees, with the fragrance of their blooms mingling with the golden beauty of the fruit ; limes, guavas, the tall, palm-like tree which bears the melon-sepota ; and a magnificent cluster of bananas, with their broad, tropical leaves overshadowing a quaint, round well, beside which lay the red *cantaro*, or water-jar of pottery, which was used to draw the water for purposes of irrigation.

On the low stone curb of this well Carmela sat down, unconscious how charming a picture she made, with the background of drooping foliage behind her, a soft evening light filling earth and

sky, and falling into this quiet spot, truly "a garden enclosed; for the high adobe walls shut out all neighboring sights and sounds, and made its privacy inviolate. Silent and motionless she sat for some time, gazing absently down into the deep, crystal pool that reflected her image vaguely, and saying to herself again and again, "I must try to be patient if I do not hear to-day. *Madre de Dios*, help me to be patient! I feel no doubt of him—not the least; and I must have faith and courage. A thousand accidents may have happened to prevent his coming or writing. All will be explained in time. I have only to wait. I must—I will—wait with patience."

But the bravery of these resolves died away in the now familiar sickness of the heart when she heard Rodolfo's step. She hardly dared look toward him as he entered the door of the enclosure; and it was his eager, glad voice that told her first, "I have a letter for you!"

A letter! There was but one, she knew, that he would announce in that tone; and so she held out her hand with a tremulous smile, a feeling that the relief was almost too great to be borne, when she saw the foreign stamps and Lestrangle's familiar writing. Rodolfo, as flushed and triumphant as if he had produced the letter himself, felt even his boy's soul thrilled by the light in her

eyes as she looked at him. "You have brought me what I longed for," she answered, in a low tone. And then, before breaking the seal, she bent forward and kissed him.

He had instinctive delicacy enough to go away and leave her then. She opened the envelope and drew forth the enclosure. There was not a single misgiving in her heart as she unfolded it, —nothing whatever to prepare her for the coming blow. This is what she read :

"MY BELOVED CARMELA :—How often you must have asked yourself since we parted why I have been so long silent, why I have not written to tell you what hope there is for us! The answer to this is, that I have waited from day to day, trusting to have some good news to send you ; for why should I write only to tell you that you possess my whole heart, since you know that well? There has not been a day or an hour since we parted that has not been filled for me with the thought of you, and with longing for you. If I followed the impulse of my heart I would, instead of sending this poor letter, fly to you myself ; but to do so would be only to give us each more pain, since it would involve another separation."

She paused a moment here, and her hand went

to her heart with the unconscious motion of one who is caught in the sharp, quick grasp of that pain of which he spoke. Did he think that to her as to him it would be spared by absence? The thought dimly crossed her mind as she looked up at the distant heaven with an appealing glance. Did he realize nothing of the nature of the pang which he sent to pierce her soul? It was a minute before she could gather the forces of that soul sufficiently to read what was written next.

“For, alas, my dearest one!” the letter went on, “we have no alternative but separation—at least for a time. The necessity of telling you this has almost unmanned me. I have suffered more than words can convey any idea of to you; but there is nothing to be gained by deceiving ourselves. My parents positively refuse their consent to our marriage; and I should return to you at once, without this consent, so unreasonably withheld, if it were not for the fact that *your* parents would refuse to receive me in that case. Your mother made that clearly understood when I saw her last in Guadalajara. So our happiness is totally shipwrecked by those who should care most to secure it. I confess that I feel very bitterly toward both my parents and yours, and I would set their wishes at defiance if I could only count upon you. But I know well that you will

never marry me without your mother's consent. This, you are well aware, she will never give under present circumstances, so I see little hope for us in the future.

“Of course, if we remain constant to each other, time may do something for us; all things come, we are told, to those who know how to wait. But when I think of the consequences of such waiting—of your wearing out your youth and beauty alone, and I growing bitter under disappointment,—my soul recoils from the prospect. O my Carmela, if you were only brave enough to bid me come to you at any cost, we might bear down the opposition which threatens to divide us, and spend our lives together in happiness! But I know that you will not do this. You are bound by an obsolete superstition of duty, and you do not realize that we have a right to seek and secure our own happiness, without regard to the opposition of others. Could I teach you this—but it is hopeless! I recall your beautiful face as I saw it last, and I know that you love your ideal of duty better than you love me.

“And so what is left us but to suffer apart, since we are forbidden to be happy together? I am too miserable even to indulge in hope for the future. All seems ended in darkness. Fate has separated us mercilessly, and it is your will

that we should submit to the separation. I am sure of this. And perhaps it is best for you ; since if I offended my aunt—and it is on her opposition that that of my parents is based—I should have little to offer you save undying love and the life of a poor artist.

“Therefore, unless fate relents for us, farewell, my Carmela—my beautiful, dark-eyed love ! To let my thoughts rest on you causes me pain beyond all expression, but I am unalterably and devotedly

“Yours,

“ARTHUR LESTRANGE.”

An hour later Señora Rodriguez, hearing from Rodolfo of the letter Carmela had received, and rendered uneasy by her long absence, went into the *huerta* to seek the girl. A tender twilight, rose-hued in the west where the delicate silver crescent of a new moon hung, had taken the place of day, and she hardly saw at first the figure seated motionless on the curb of the well, under the dark shadow of the bananas. At her advance, however, Carmela rose and walked toward her,—a creature so pale and spirit-like in the gloaming that she scarcely seemed to belong to earth.

“You are seeking me, Andrea?” she said.

“ You thought perhaps some harm had come to me? No, I have only been thinking. I have had a letter, you know—and it ends everything. One needs to think a little before one quite understands such a thing as that. What has it all been for—the close knitting of our hearts, the pain of love, the agony of parting? God will perhaps make it clear some day, but now—now—”

Now suddenly a little respite of pain came to the overwrought mind and heart. The slight figure swayed, and Doña Andrea held out her arms not an instant too soon ; for Carmela had fainted as she fell into them.

CHAPTER XV.

"O MR. LESTRANGE, what a charming picture!" cried a girl's eager voice. "Why have you not showed us this? It is a Spanish scene, is it not? Where did you paint it, and when?"

Lestrangle turned around quickly. He was doing the honors of his studio to a group of ladies, who had come to admire his bric-à-brac and glance at his pictures. He had not anticipated that they would do more than glance at them, and therefore had put on view only such as were likely to please tastes not too severely critical. He had not reckoned on Octave Fenton's honest enthusiasm for art—probably he did not believe in it, for he was very sceptical of most things; and when she suggested looking at some of his unexhibited canvases, while the others sank into easy chairs and talked gossip, he had assented carelessly, fancying that she wished to affect a little more interest or had a little more curiosity than the others. He had almost forgotten her as she wandered out of sight behind the large easel, and was thinking what a charmingly picturesque figure pretty,

fashionable Mrs. Joyce made, in her gray-green æsthetic gown, with the rich masses of her reddish-brown hair, when Octave's clear, high voice suddenly started him by uttering the words recorded above.

He knew what she had found before he saw the canvas on which was painted the interior of the Santuario of Guadalajara and Carmela's kneeling figure. Months had passed since he last looked at the picture, which had been thrust away, out of sight, in a corner so obscure that it was surprising Miss Fenton found it. He had great command of countenance, but as his eye fell on it every one noticed the change of his expression. "There is some disagreeable association connected with that picture," said one shrewd girl to herself. But if he could not control his face, Lestrangle was at least able to control his voice perfectly.

"You like that?" he remarked, carelessly. "It is a Mexican scene, which I attempted to paint in the Spanish fashion when I was in Mexico last winter. I never thought it a success, and so did not care to show it."

"Well, if I am any judge, it is by far the best painting you have in your studio," said Miss Fenton, decidedly. "The old church is admirably indicated; and as for the figure, it is beauti-

ful. What an exquisite face! How *can* you not think it good?"

"Why, it is really charming!" cried Mrs. Joyce, putting up an eye-glass with a long handle, and strolling toward the picture, followed by the whole visiting group, and, as in duty bound the much vexed Lestrangle.

Then ensued a chorus of admiration; for the picture, beside being to an artistic eye the best thing he had ever done, as Miriam had said during its progress, was also beautiful enough to please the popular taste. There were many comments and inquiries, but the culmination of annoyance was reached for Lestrangle when some one asked: "But who was your model? You must have had a model for that lovely face."

"A young Mexican girl whom I knew was kind enough to sit to me," he answered. And then he turned and walked away, unable to control his irritation longer. To stand and look at Carmela's face, with all the associations which it wakened, was bad enough; but to have to answer such questions—

"If you care for Mexican scenes, Mrs. Joyce, here is something that may please you," he said in his desperation, pulling out another canvas. "It is a view in Orizaba; I tried to represent some really tropical color here."

The diversion served its purpose, and the fluttering group came like a flock of birds over to the new subject of interest. Only Octave Fenton remained as if spellbound before the picture that she had discovered. The rich, dim interior of the old church, and the exquisite, pathetic face of the kneeling girl, fascinated her. "Who would have believed he could paint like this!" she thought. "I am sure of one thing—there is some story connected with the picture, else he would be only too glad to show it."

The story connected with the picture had by this time grown to be a very old one in the mind of Lestrangle; but it was associated with the recollection of so much pain that he disliked exceedingly to revert to it even for a moment. Some natures have a much greater abhorrence of pain than others, disagreeable as it undoubtedly is to all of us. Such natures fly from it, abjure every association connected with it, and soon grow to dislike every person that, however unconsciously, has been the cause of it. So now the sight perhaps least agreeable in the world to Lestrangle was that of Carmela's face. Little as he had considered her from the beginning to the end of their brief love affair, an instinct which could not be smothered told him how great a change his conduct had wrought in her life, and how unworthily

he had borne himself toward her. Worst of all pain to him was that which touched his self-love. Had he played a more heroic part, he could have borne with equanimity the thought of Carmela's suffering ; and his recollection of her would have been tinged with a pleasant, sentimental regret. But now this recollection was like the touch of a scorpion ; for he felt that he had acted in a manner which must rob her recollection of him of any sweetness.

At the present time he did not feel very amiably toward Miss Fenton, whose researches had roused these uncomfortable, slumbering memories ; but he would have felt still less so had he known that two ladies at this moment ascending the stairs that led to his door, with the intention of paying him a visit, were his sister Miriam and his aunt Mrs. Thorpe. There was, of course, no reason why they should not see the picture as well as others, except that he disliked intensely anything likely to lead to the subject which had been a long-forbidden one between Miriam and himself. On the appearance of the two unwelcome figures it was, however, too late to conceal the canvas, and he could only hope that if his sister saw it she would have sufficient discretion not to direct his aunt's attention to it.

Nothing was further from Miriam's thoughts

than to do so, although she had not been more than a few minutes in the studio before she perceived to her great surprise the familiar picture. But Mrs. Thorpe was not at all likely to see it unless her attention was drawn to it, for she was exceedingly near-sighted; so, leaving her occupied with the others, Miriam walked alone over to the canvas, where Octave Fenton still stood.

"O Miss Lestrangle, is it you?" said the latter, turning around. "I am so glad you have come! Tell me, do you not think this is the best thing your brother ever painted?"

"Yes, I have always thought so," Miriam answered. Despite herself, she could not help a sad inflection in her tone, a sad look on her face, as she gazed at the sweet, familiar countenance, "My poor Carmelita!" she thought. "I was right in believing it a dark day for you when you met a man who was capable of loving only himself."

The girl beside her looked at her shrewdly. "It is strange that Mr. Lestrangle does not like it," she observed.

"He has grown tired of it, I suppose," replied Miriam, quietly; and the words had a bitter meaning to herself.

"Tired of what?" asked a voice at her shoul-

der, which made her start. It was Mrs. Thorpe, who had followed, and was now peering at the picture, in her near-sighted fashion, through her glasses. "Has Arthiur tired of this painting?" she repeated. "But it seems to me very well done. What is it, Miriam—a Mexican scene?"

"Yes," said Miriam, with an involuntary coldness in her tone. "It is a view of the interior of an old church in Guadalajara."

"And the girl?"

"That is a portrait of Carmela Lestrangle," Miriam replied distinctly. And then she turned and walked away.

This time Mrs. Thorpe did not follow her. Probably she felt some curiosity to examine the face of one of whom she had heard so much. She certainly stood looking intently at the picture for some time, unheeding Miss Fenton's remarks, until that young lady also walked away and left her alone. What did the lovely, prayerful countenance, with all its unworldly suggestions say to her? Some deep chord it certainly touched; for, as she looked, something like a mist came over her sight. Was she thinking how ruthlessly her opposition, acting on a weak will, had cut short the happiness of the young life, or had her thoughts wandered back farther yet into the past? There was no suggestion in the beau-

tiful Spanish face of one she had once known well; but in itself it was so full of a spiritual charm which it was strange that Arthur Lestrangle could ever have painted, so gentle and so noble, that she found herself conscious of a singular fascination as she gazed at it. She was a woman of strong feeling and strong will, and a sense of contempt suddenly rose within her for the man who had yielded all hope of setting this face as a star in his life, for the sake of a possible fortune. "If he had held to his purpose I should have been very angry, but I would have respected him more," she thought. "But perhaps, after all, this may be an idealized face, and the girl herself commonplace enough. I will ask Miriam."

She looked around. The group of ladies were gathered about a tea-table which, as if by magic, had appeared; and Lestrangle at that moment was saying to his sister, in a peremptory aside, "For Heaven's sake, Miriam, go and bring Aunt Elinor to have a cup of tea! What is she doing at that picture?"

The young girl shrugged her shoulders with the slightest gesture as she rose to go. She had no sympathy for his evident perturbation. "What difference does it make whether Aunt Elinor looks at the picture or not?" she thought.

"Is he afraid that she will disapprove of his having even a shadow of Carmela?"

But she was not prepared for the question with which Mrs. Thorpe met her. "You are the very person I want," she said, before Miriam could suggest tea. "You can tell me if this is really a portrait of that girl in Mexico, or has Arthur merely used her face as the basis of an ideal countenance? Artists often do that, you know."

Miriam shook her head. "Arthur did not do it," she answered. "In fact, I do not think any one could idealize Carmela's face. It is ideal itself. That is a very good portrait. Arthur succeeded better than I ever knew him to succeed with any subject before."

"She really looks like that?"

"It is a striking likeness."

There was a moment's pause, in which each looked silently at the tender face against its dim, rich background. Then Mrs. Thorpe said, meditatively:

"I cannot understand why Arthur fell in love with her. He has always had a passion for women of the world—for those who have the stamp of fashion on their beauty,—and this girl looks like a nun."

"She did not always look so," returned Miriam. "She had many expressions, and all were charm-

ing. She is an exquisite creature altogether, and formed to fascinate any one with an artistic nature. The marvel to me is that even Arthur could forget her so soon."

Mrs. Thorpe made no comment on the last words. Perhaps they found an echo in her own mind. After a moment's longer hesitation, she said: "Do you ever hear from her?"

"Never," replied Miss Lestrangle. "I think the best thing for her is to forget that she ever saw us, and so I have not written since we parted. But suppose we drop the subject, Aunt Elinor? It is a very painful one to me. Will you not come and take a cup of tea?"

Mrs. Thorpe turned away from the picture and walked across the room to the tea-table; but as she drank her tea it was in a very absent-minded mood. Instead of the studio elaborately hung with Eastern draperies and lined with the bric-à-brac which it had been Lestrangle's delight to collect in many lands, she seemed to see before her the dim old interior of the Santuario; and instead of the gay faces of the fashionable and æsthetically attired young ladies around her, the wistful, beautiful Spanish face amid its dark draperies. She had a most unreasonable sense of irritation in listening to Lestrangle's easy flow of trivial talk. How could he be so light-hearted

and frivolous, with the memory of that face in the background, as it were, of his life? For Mrs. Thorpe, to whom for the first time Carmela had become a real personality, overlooked the fact that the reverse of this process had gone on with Lestrangle, and that to him she had become less real day by day, until now the memory of her seldom troubled him.

But that it had troubled him to-day there could be no doubt, despite the apparent light-heartedness of his manner. He had been forced to look at the face which he had not summoned even out of his recollection for months, and it haunted him in spite of a very enviable facility which he possessed for banishing disagreeable thoughts. He was, moreover, disquieted by the interest which Mrs. Thorpe had exhibited in the picture; and more disquieted still by a certain coolness in her manner when she took leave of him. Had the mere sight of Carmela's face offended her so much that she was prepared to again visit her displeasure on him for an affair which he had given up at her bidding? So important had her favor grown to him, with the increasing love of luxury and desirability of all those things which wealth can bestow, that he trembled at anything that threatened its withdrawal. That evening he appeared in the do-

mestic circle, which was by no means his ordinary custom, and as soon as possible drew Miriam aside.

"What was Aunt Elinor saying to you this afternoon about that picture?" he asked at once.

"Nothing of any importance," his sister replied. "She asked if it was a likeness of Carmela or an ideal face with her face as a basis."

"How did she know that it was a likeness of Carmela at all?"

"I told her—when she inquired whom it represented."

"And what else did you tell her?"

"Nothing. What else was there to tell? Carmela is a subject I do not care to discuss with her—or with you."

"I have no desire to discuss it," said Lestrangle, flushing angrily. "I am well aware that you have never done me justice in this matter. Could I force the consent of Carmela's mother, who was obstinately determined against me?"

Miriam made a slight gesture of disdain. "Spare me your excuses," she said. "Unfortunately I know how shallow they are, and unfortunately also I foresaw how the whole thing would end before we left Mexico. It has not surprised me at all. What did surprise me a little, however, was the manner in which Aunt Elinor

seemed touched and interested by that picture to-day. Carmela's sweet countenance fascinated her, as it fascinates every one. I could tell by her face that she began to feel somewhat remorseful for her share in the matter. Perhaps," added the young girl, not without some malicious intent, "she might reverse her decision if you brought sufficient pressure to bear—that is, of course, taking it for granted that you would care to have it reversed."

"I was not aware," remarked Lestrangle, loftily, "that Mrs. Thorpe's decision had anything to do with my conduct—at least, not anything directly. Of course her opposition influenced my parents; and since they withheld their consent, I could not return to Mexico. It would have been useless."

"Arthur, how *can* you be such a humbug?" cried his sister, impatiently. "You know that papa and mamma would have done whatever you wished. I heard them put the matter to you plainly. 'You are old enough to decide for yourself,' papa said. 'If you are sure enough of yourself to give up a fortune in order to marry this girl, and depend on your own exertions all your life, I will give my consent; but I strongly advise you to think well what you are about.' And you did think so well that you never went

back to Mexico—as I was sure you never would when we left there.”

“And why should I have gone back, even from your point of view, since marrying Carmela would have meant simply the ruining of my career—for poverty would cramp my powers utterly,—and condemning her to a life of narrow means and constant struggle? It seems to me one had better be dead than deliberately embrace such a life as that.”

“That is your view of the matter! One should pause, then—as I advised you to pause,—before yielding to the fancy of the moment, and drawing another into unhappiness which it is difficult to measure.”

“It is quite useless for us to speak on this subject any further,” said Arthur, rising from his seat. “As I said in the beginning, you have never done me justice in the affair, and I never expect that you will.”

He retired from the conversation with dignity, but not without an increase of disquiet. What did Miriam mean by talking of Mrs. Thorpe having been “touched and interested” by Carmela’s face? Did she really think that there might be a possibility of that lady’s reconsidering her opposition to his marriage to the Mexican girl, or was such a suggestion only one of Miriam’s ways

of making herself disagreeable? He said to himself that it might be only the last ; but if it were the first—the suggestion tore away the last shred of the illusion of sentimental regret in which it had pleased him up to this time to envelop the subject ; and the young man acknowledged that, if all obstacles were removed, he would not now desire to return to Carmela or renew their severed relations.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN all Guadalajara, filled as it is with beautiful churches, there is no church more quaintly beautiful without or interesting within than the ancient Church of Santa Monica, once part of a great convent foundation. The nuns are gone from their picturesque cloisters and courts, and what was once their secluded garden is now a public square ; but their lovely old church remains, dedicated still to the worship of God. Its great doors, surrounded by the most elaborate stone carving, lead into one of those noble naves, rich in stately altars, gilding, metal-work and inlaid wood, which delight every church-going wanderer in Mexico.

Such a wanderer entered one day when the Adoration of the Forty Hours was going on. She was an elderly lady, of striking appearance,—a foreigner and no Catholic ; for as she advanced slowly up the nave, having entered at the lower door, she did not bend her knee to the Sacred Presence throned upon the high altar, amid velvet draperies, golden lights, and silver lilies. But presently, perceiving a dark old bench of polished

wood against one of the walls, she sat down on it and gazed deliberately around her. Many people were kneeling upon the pavement of the church, but these she did not notice until she had fully observed every detail of architecture and decoration. Then her attention turned for a moment to the human objects about her; and as her glance wandered over them, she suddenly started, and her expression of indifference changed to one of keenest interest; for not more than a few paces from her knelt a girl whose attitude and face were alike familiar. It was as if the figure in Arthur Lestrangle's picture had been quickened into life. Here was the unconscious grace of position, the slender, harmonious lines of the form outlined under the dark drapery which shrouded it; and the tender, beautiful face, with its delicate features and tints, its dark, liquid eyes and expression of absorbed devotion, uplifted toward the altar.

"There can be no mistake—this is the original of that picture!" thought the lady. "It is as if the picture itself were before me. Miriam was right in saying it was not flattered. What a lovely face!"

She found the fascination of its gentle beauty so great that she could hardly withdraw her eyes from it; but not even the magnetism of her

steady gaze attracted the attention of the kneeling girl. Her own gaze did not waver for an instant from the altar, where it was fixed upon the Sacred Host, with a look so intense in its faith and adoration that at length the lady watching her grew almost nervous.

"It is almost as if she *saw* something supernatural," she said to herself. "It is a wonderful doctrine, that of the Real Presence. I almost wish that I believed in it. What a comfort it would be to enter a church and find God Himself there to hear one—but, of course, it is all superstition and not to be thought of!"

Nevertheless, the atmosphere of the sanctuary had its effect upon her; perhaps, too, the silent force of example, the respect and reverence of the people who came and went; for when she rose she hesitated a moment, and then, kneeling down, prayed for a short time, after which she slowly walked, as if reluctant, from the beautiful church, with its atmosphere of infinite calm, and its radiant altar bearing the throne of its Sacramental King.

When Carmela ended her devotions and came out, a little later, she observed a lady, evidently a foreigner from her dress, standing in the shade of the deep, arched doorway, gazing out on the sunlit street. It was the swiftest glance which

the girl bestowed as she was about to pass by, when, to her great surprise, the stranger spoke.

"You are Carmela Lestrangle," she ventured to say. "Is it not so?"

"That is my name," Carmela answered, pausing. "Can I do anything for you, Señora?"

"I once knew your father very well," continued the stranger; "so perhaps you will think that I have a claim to your acquaintance. You have probably heard Arthur Lestrangle speak of me. I am his aunt, Mrs. Thorpe."

She looked at the girl keenly as she uttered the last words, but there was little to reward her scrutiny in the calm face. Had she known Carmela before, she would have recognized a great change in that face during the past year. Something had gone from it, never to return; but much had also come into it. Sorrow, the great teacher of human hearts and chiseller of human countenances, had wrought its work there. The dark eyes had lost their dreamy, wistful look, and faced life with a soft, steady gaze; the sensitive lips had learned to set themselves firmly; and even the very lines of the features seemed to have indefinitely changed. The sound of Arthur Lestrangle's name did indeed strike her like an unexpected blow; but she had learned in a hard school how to bear such blows; and there was

only the look of surprise and slight withdrawal on her face, which was very natural under the circumstances.

"I have heard of you, Señora," she answered, with quiet dignity, and then stood waiting for Mrs. Thorpe to proceed.

This was a little more difficult than that lady had reckoned upon. She hesitated for a moment, and those who knew her best would have been astonished at the tone in which she finally said:

"I can imagine that my name has not a pleasant sound to you, and no doubt you wonder why I approach you at all. The reason is that I would like to know you—if you have no objection to knowing me."

"Why should I object?" asked Carmela, with a slight accent of delicate pride. "But, if I may also ask, why should you wish to know me?"

"For one reason, because, as I have already told you, I knew your father well in days long gone by. Also, if I have helped to do you any harm—to cause you any pain—I should like to learn how best to remedy that."

"There is no remedy," said the girl, calmly and coldly. "Since you knew my father, Señora, I am quite willing to do anything that I can for you; but if we are to become acquaintances, I must ask one favor—that the name of Señor

Lestrangle may never be mentioned between us. I hope that he is well and happy, but beyond that I have no interest in anything concerning him."

The dignity of this condition pleased Mrs. Thorpe. Her respect for the young girl increased momentarily ; and, in proportion to the apparent difficulty of knowing her, interest in her seemed to wax greater.

"That shall be as you wish," she answered. "I assure you that my desire to know you is now quite independent of anything relating to Arthur Lestrangle. Only let me say before we dismiss the subject that I am heartily sorry for the opposition which caused you, no doubt, much suffering. The thought of it has preyed upon me, and I have at last come to Mexico for no other purpose than to see you."

"That is very kind of you," observed Carmela, gently. "But do not think any more of my suffering. God permitted it, and that is enough. As for your opposition, it was surely natural ; for what did you know of a stranger and foreigner? That also God permitted, and what He permits is the expression of His will. Now we will say no more of it. My home is yonder in sight. Will you come and meet my mother?"

Mrs. Thorpe assented, and accompanied the girl across the street, feeling somewhat like one

in a dream. For it was one thing to seek the acquaintance of Henry Lestrangle's daughter, and another to meet the woman whom he had married when, after he had parted from her with a lover's quarrel, he had wandered down into Mexico, and returned no more. She had never forgiven him for taking her at her word, and going so far away that no other, softer word could reach him ; and it had been that flame of resentment, surviving through half a lifetime, which had dictated her opposition to Arthur Lestrangle's proposed marriage. But the sight of Carmela's pictured face had caused a change of sentiment which astonished herself. It suddenly seemed a very poor and contemptible thing to visit on this girl the fault committed a quarter of a century before, by two quick-tempered people,—the fault which she now acknowledged had been chiefly her own. It was as Miriam had been acute enough to perceive ; remorse was roused ; and, since her nature was at bottom a just and generous one, she could not banish the thoughts which presented themselves. It is almost unnecessary to say that she felt no concern about Lestrangle ; he had accepted the matter as she had known that he would, and was evidently in no need of consolation. But Carmela's face, expressing such possibilities of passion and suffering,

haunted her, do what she would to banish it. The matter ended in her going to Southern California for the winter, in search of climate and health; and then suddenly, without communicating her intentions to her relatives at home, journeying down into Mexico. "I must see that girl for myself," she thought; "discover what she really is, and decide what it is best to do."

Such had been her intention in coming; but now she had a curious feeling of there being nothing for her to do—of all decision being taken out of her hands,—as she followed Carmela into the bright, pretty dwelling, with its plant-filled *patio*, its classic arches and shining tiled floors, which pleased her eyes much as it had a year before pleased those of Arthur LeStrange, when he came with shrinking reluctance to meet his unknown cousin.

A lovely, dark-eyed little girl, of five or six years old, met them as they entered; and to her Carmela spoke in the caressing terms which the Spanish language holds above all others, bidding her go at once and tell her mother that a visitor wished to see her.

"Does your mother know—anything of me?" asked Mrs. Thorpe as they entered the *sala*; for it suddenly occurred to her that Señora Echeveria might possibly receive coldly one who had

played such a part in preventing her daughter's marriage. She had heard of no opposition on the other side, and had supposed that Arthur Lestrangle had been accepted by all concerned without demur.

"I do not think that my mother has ever heard of you," answered Carmela, truthfully. "I never thought it necessary to tell her all I knew; nor is it necessary now," she added, quietly. "Your claim upon me is as a friend of my father. I will present you to her as such."

"Very well," said Mrs. Thorpe, meekly, her usual imperiousness altogether subdued by the strange and unlooked for position in which she found herself.

And when the large, good-natured presence of Señora Echeveria entered, the past seemed to recede away into immeasurable distance. How could she connect this middle-aged, matronly woman with the young lover who had left her? One thing was certain; to such a woman as this Henry Lestrangle had never given what he had taken from *her*; and there was a strange consolation in the thought. It was as if something of the past had been given back to her even at this late day.

Señora Echeveria, who had indeed never heard Mrs. Thorpe's name from the Lestranges, nor had

the least reason to connect her with them, met the stranger with the charming Mexican courtesy which leaves nothing to be desired. Hearing that she was alone in the city, with only her maid for companion, she begged her to consider the house in which she was her own, and readily acceded to her request that Carmela might be permitted to visit her.

“I hope that you will come very soon,” Mrs. Thorpe said to the girl when she presently rose to take leave. “I know that there is not apparently much inducement for you to do so; but I think from your appearance that you like works of charity, and it will be a work of charity to let me see something of you. I do not think,” she added, “that I ever said as much as that to any one in the world before. I am usually a very self-sufficing person; but I have now a strong desire to know more of you.”

“I will come,” said Carmela, touched by a wistful look in the gray eyes fastened on her as Mrs. Thorpe made this (for her) truly remarkable speech. “I think you will find that there is nothing very much to know about me: but since you are a stranger here, I may be of use to you.”

“Of very much use,” was the reply; “for I do not speak a word of Spanish, and I detest the idea of employing a guide and interpreter; so I

have been wandering about for a day or two, seeing things at random, and no doubt missing much more than I saw. It was by the merest accident that I chanced to-day into the beautiful old church over yonder. I fell in love with its exterior yesterday, but it was closed; so I came back to-day to see if I could enter."

"All strangers admire Santa Monica," said Carmela, thinking how she had first seen Arthur Lestrangle standing in rapt contemplation of its richly carved façade. "But you have not told me how you knew *me*," she added, with a surprised recollection of this stranger's recognition.

"I will wait to tell you that until you come to see me," answered Mrs. Thorpe, who did not care to mention Lestrangle's picture. "If you have a little curiosity, the prospect of its gratification may serve to bring you more quickly."

CHAPTER XVII.

IT was certainly a singular association which followed between Carmela and the woman who was the direct cause of all that she had suffered in parting from her lover. The remembrance of this fact made the girl at first conscious of an intense reluctance to see more of one who had so strangely intruded into her life, and whose mere name was fraught with the most painful associations ; but it did not take long for her to say to herself that because the thing was difficult and altogether opposed to her inclination was the more reason for doing it. And since it was to be done, she did it with the grace which characterized her in all things. Perhaps it was the reward of the really heroic effort which she had to make that her repugnance faded away, and she found in Mrs. Thorpe much that was sympathetic and companionable.

There is probably no more agreeable person in the world than a cultivated elderly woman of original character. The crudity of youth has gone, the enriching experiences of life have come, and from the independent position of middle age

she looks upon the world with a pleasant philosophy born of knowledge. Such a woman was Mrs. Thorpe. When she had quarrelled in her imperious youth with Henry Lestrangle, and he had gone away in anger hot as her own, she married a man who was the choice of her family, —a wealthy suitor, who lived only a few years, and, dying, left her in unfettered possession of his large fortune. Having no children, she was free as air, and there were few parts of the civilized world in which she had not travelled or lived. A clever woman always, she became under this educational process a very cultivated one; a woman exceedingly popular in society where society is not given up to the reign of immature girls and boys, but whose immediate family did not derive as much gratification as they might otherwise have done from her association, owing to the same imperiousness of nature which had made shipwreck of her life's one love affair.

Such a woman was a new and altogether attractive personality to Carmela; and in the attraction, in the charm of the strong character and varied experience, the worldly knowledge and intellectual culture, she at last forgot the repugnance which in the beginning she had so hard a struggle to overcome. There could be no doubt that Mrs. Thorpe put forth all her powers to

charm ; for she was too shrewd not to imagine, if she did not discern, the reluctance with which Carmela yielded to her request for acquaintance. It was this reluctance which stimulated her desire to know the girl, as men are sometimes said to be stimulated in passion by a like cause. Had there been on Carmela's side the least eagerness to know or propitiate *her*, had her advances even been met half way, her interest would probably have died very soon ; but as it was she found a positive fascination in this nature, so simple, so direct, so full of gentle sympathy with all things, so unswervingly true to the highest ideals, and so absolutely untouched by the world. Accustomed to girls whose worldliness almost shamed her own, and in whom intellectual gifts took the form of the cleverness which the world values, this gentle creature, with her purity of heart, her poetic mind, and her intense spiritual life, was a revelation, over which her wonder daily grew. And so it came about that for the second time Carmela found herself, much to her own surprise, acting as companion and guide for a stranger among the scenes of her beautiful native city.

At first the pain was great ; for many associations recalled vividly those days of the year past when she had accompanied Miriam and Arthur Lestrangle to these same places. But months of

struggle and prayer had done their work; and she found that many things which she had avoided, many scenes and many recollections, when she faced them had lost their power to wound. God had come to the aid of the heart that had striven to submit itself to His will, and had asked that no alien influence might be permitted to draw it from Him. When the first sharp agony was passed, and something of calmness returned to her soul, she had recognized that what she had suffered was the inevitable result of yielding to a passion which had sought no warrant or blessing from God; and even in the midst of suffering she had begged that He would grant, *not* that which the undisciplined heart desired, but that which would be best in His sight. When the soul is able to rise to this height the worst sting is taken from pain. And so Carmela found it. Submission came like a healing balm; and it was less the thought of his unworthy conduct to herself which made her put Arthur Lestrangle with an act of final renunciation out of her life, than the realization—now first strongly borne to her—that one who denied and ignored God could surely be no fitting mate for one who loved and served him.

With this fixed conclusion in her mind, it cost her no effort to refrain from ever mentioning

his name in her association with his aunt. She knew by an instinct how often that name was on Mrs. Thorpe's lips, but she gave no encouragement for its utterance. There was nothing from which she shrank so much as from any discussion of that past, which seemed still fresh and living when touched upon; and aware that what the elder lady desired most to learn was whether she could be allowed to undo the consequences of her opposition, she hoped that the irrevocable character of these consequences might be made plain to her without words.

It was surely a strange and unexpected reversal of things, and sometimes struck Mrs. Thorp in a light that was almost ludicrous. She had journeyed down into Mexico expecting to find a lovelorn girl, who would eagerly welcome her advances and gladly receive again the lover who had been taken from her. But instead she found herself barred from even touching the subject by a dignity and reticence which it was impossible not to respect. "I must be patient," she thought, "and win her confidence by degrees. It is not strange that she should not trust me,—not strange that she should be too proud to allow me to make things right at once. I must gain her liking before I can be allowed to do anything."

This was, however, a longer process than she had anticipated, and a result which she had not reckoned upon occurred in the course of it. She began to ask herself whether Arthur Lestrangle was worthy of the girl whose character unfolded before her; and more and more the conclusion was pressed upon her that he was not. "But what difference does that make?" she asked herself, impatiently. "Why should I trouble myself about it? Are not such things occurring every day—women loving and marrying men unworthy of them and, *vice versa*? But I never realized until he was tried by this affair how weak, how untrustworthy and how mercenary Arthur is; and this girl, with her ideal nature, deserves a better fate than to marry him. That however, is her own affair. The question for me is simply, does she still love him and will she forgive his desertion? I almost hope not; but if she will, she shall have him back. Perhaps if she loves him very much she may never find out how pitiful he is. Women are sometimes made like that."

Whether or not Carmela was made like that remained for some time an open question in Mrs. Thorpe's mind. Meanwhile these two became good friends, strange as the friendship of two such diverse natures seemed. But there was more

in common between them than appeared on the surface ; and one result of their association would have most surprised those who knew Mrs. Thorpe best, or supposed that they knew her best. She developed an interest in the churches which was apart from their beauty of architecture and decoration, or their historical associations ; she liked to go with Carmela to visit the many institutions of charity which survive the wreck of the religious foundations ; and she evinced a curiosity with regard to Catholic ceremonials and doctrines which often astonished her companion.

“ Religion is something in which I have never before taken any interest,” she frankly said one day. “ The fact is that it has never before showed me a face in which I could feel interest. The faith I was brought up in has not at any time had any hold upon my mind or my taste. Of course I have seen something of your faith in the years I have spent abroad ; but I was absorbed in social life, and rarely entered a church for a religious purpose. Here I find something that has touched me very much. Perhaps it is the remarkable faith and devotion of the people ; or perhaps the thought that the Church which could so wonderfully convert a whole nation and render it as intensely Catholic as any country of

the Old World, must have a divine principle of life."

"The promise of our Lord to be with His Church 'all days, even to the consummation of the world,' was given in special connection with the command to teach all nations," replied Carmela; "so why should it not succeed in teaching them? Indeed, how could it fail?"

"Other religious systems fail so utterly," said Mrs. Thorpe. "I have been about the world with eyes sufficiently open to see that, even if it were not a notorious fact. And with such utter failure—with the contempt and repugnance with which Protestantism seems to inspire a heathen people—a success like this stands out in wonderful contrast. To enter these churches is almost enough to make one a Catholic at once."

"Why not *altogether*, instead of *almost*?" asked Carmela, smiling gently.

But, although she asked the question, she had little idea that Mrs. Thorpe would ever do more than abstractly admire the wonderful power of the Church, as Miriam and Arthur LeStrange had admired its poetry and beauty. She did not comprehend how entirely the elder woman was of a different nature from her two cousins. Outwardly the least likely to be impressed by spiritual influences, she possessed in reality a nature

sincere to the core and seeking verity in all things. Never before, as she said, had any spiritual influence appealed to her which she could respect. Heretofore she had passed by the portals of the great Church of all ages, thinking of it as something altogether alien,—something with which she had nothing to do ; while Christianity, as it appeared to her in the fragmentary forms with which she was familiar, had seemed to merit much of the scorn of unbelievers. That she had not herself belonged to this class was solely owing to the fact that she had never given the subject sufficient consideration—never, as she said, taken sufficient interest in it—to formulate into definite opinions her half-unconscious thoughts.

But now the nature that had scorned the unreal was seized by the vital strength of the real, which for the first time appealed to it directly. For the first time she saw clearly before her eyes the power of the great, living organization which alone on earth represents and wields the power of God ; and saw it, as it strikes most an observant and thoughtful mind, in its amazing work of converting and ruling the diverse nations of men. Whence had been drawn the marvellous skill to adapt one creed to all races, and—as she saw here in Mexico—to imprint it so deeply on the

minds and hearts of a people who only yesterday were practising a savage idolatry, that to-day no efforts of false teachers or persecution of government can shake their faith?

These were the questions she asked herself, and then asked Carmela,—not because she expected an answer from the latter, but because their utterance had become necessary. She was more than surprised that Carmela answered them so readily,—that things which had seemed insoluble problems to her trained intellect were simplest of questions to the girl who had the knowledge and gift of divine faith. And this was one of the people whom she had arrogantly despised as ignorant and superstitious! She had the grace to blush when in the light of her present experience she recalled her past opinions.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"CARMELA," asked Mrs. Thorpe one day, somewhat abruptly, "have you ever been to the city of Mexico?"

"Never, replied Carmela.

"And would you like to go?"

"Yes," the girl answered—not as she would have answered a year before, with a quick flash of interest, but quietly, almost indifferently,—
"I should like very well to go, if it were possible; but since it is not, I never think of it."

"It is entirely possible if you will do me the favor of accompanying me," said Mrs. Thorpe. "I have not been there yet; and it will never do for one to come to the country and go away without seeing the famous city that constitutes Mexico to the most of the world. So I have decided to go—if you will go with me. If not, I shall not go at all; for sight-seeing alone is dull work. I am not enough of what the English call a globe-trotter to enjoy it."

"You wish me to accompany you?" observed Carmela, with a look of surprise. "You are very kind, and I should like it; but I fear that my

parents will not think it possible for me to do so."

"I hope that they will," continued Mrs. Thorpe. "I shall explain to them that I wish you to go, not only as my companion but as my guest,—in other words, all the expense of the journey will be my affair; and I will engage to take the best possible care of you. Do you think your mother will trust you to me?"

"I do not think she would hesitate to trust you," said Carmela; but whether or not she will think it well for me to go I cannot tell."

"We will ask her at once," said Mrs. Thorpe.

Within an hour Señora Echeveria's consent had been asked and gained. She had learned to like Mrs. Thorpe, though without at all understanding her; and she was glad to give Carmela a little pleasure. The great change in the girl had not escaped her observation,—although Carmela was, if anything, more gentle, more docile, more altogether lovable in her home than before. The mother's heart had ached over her, however; and she had said more than once to her husband, "If it were only possible to give her a little diversion!" It is an old remedy in such cases; but the family was large, and the means of Señor Echeveria by no means large in proportion; so Carmela, who desired diversion as little

as possible, was spared the suggestion. It almost seemed a direct interposition of Providence that sent Mrs. Thorpe to provide it; and so the Señora gave her consent without consideration or delay. Thanking her warmly, Mrs. Thorpe took leave; and bidding Carmela remember that she would wish to start in a day or two, passed out into the streets, where a rosy after-glow still lingered, filling all the beautiful vistas with color, although the sun had gone down some time before. Across the way rose the lovely old sculptured front of Santa Monica; and in the corner of its walls, looking directly down upon her, stood an ancient and curiously quaint statue of St. Christopher bearing the Divine Child upon his shoulders. Often as she had seen the statue before, Mrs. Thorpe paused now to regard it; moved perhaps by its picturesque aspect in the soft twilight, or perhaps by a remembrance of the mediæval legend which tells how the kindly giant would serve none but the strongest; and how he was rewarded for his untiring search, his disdain of kingly power and infernal might, by bearing the Lord of all across the raging waters. Her eye fell on the lights that burned at the foot of the statue—placed there by the devotion of the people; and she who longed, too, to serve only the strongest, who had uncon-

sciously disdained all creeds of men, felt her heart warm to the great and simple seeker who became the Christ-bearer. She almost said, "St. Christopher, pray for me!" then, with a faint smile, turned and went away.

That night she wrote to Arthur Lestrangle for the first time since leaving California. And this is what she said :

"I am sure that you will be very much surprised by the date of this letter,—very much surprised to see that I am in Guadalajara, the city which you know so well. Perhaps the name will suggest to you why I am here. If not, let me tell you. After you yielded to the opposition I expressed to your proposed marriage last winter, I began to think that perhaps I had acted in a very arbitrary manner, and had used in an ungenerous way the power which my money gave me (for do not imagine that I think you would have given the slightest heed to my wishes if I had not been able to enforce them in a manner very disagreeable to you); but these feelings were not strong enough to influence my conduct until I saw in your studio the picture of Carmela Lestrangle. This picture made a deep impression upon me. It changed into a real personality what had before been a mere name to me, and forced me to realize how

deeply my conduct had affected another beside yourself,—another who, your picture showed, possessed a capability of feeling much greater than your own.

“ I left your studio that day a much disquieted woman, feeling that I had taken upon myself a responsibility which I could not justify, and which your compliant weakness—forgive me that I speak plainly,—could not excuse. I tried to forget the matter, saying to myself that what was done was done ; that the separation was an accomplished fact ; and that, so far as you were concerned, there was certainly not the least need to reconsider anything. But the face you had painted—the sensitive, delicate face showing a nature formed to feel and suffer in every fibre—haunted me; and do what I would, I could not put away the thought that this girl might be suffering in consequence of my action. The idea grew so insistent that I determined to come here and see for myself,—see what manner of person she really was, and what I could do to repair any injury I had inflicted upon her.

“ What I have found I suppose I hardly need tell you ; for it cannot be that in so short a space of time you have forgotten the peculiar charm of nature, even more than of person, which seems to set Carmela Lestrange apart from other

girls. I have seen much of her since I have been here, and there is no exaggeration in saying that she has altogether charmed me—and this without the least effort on her part; for I had difficulty in winning her toleration, and I am by no means sure even yet that I have won her liking. What her feeling for yourself may be I have not the least means of discovering. Her one condition to our acquaintance was that your name should not be mentioned to her, and this is a condition which I have faithfully observed. Therefore, I do not know what her feeling may be; but I do not think she is a person to forget lightly, and if she loved you once it is more than likely that she loves you still. This is my opinion."

"And now I come to the point of this letter, the reason why I write it. We are both well aware that it was my opposition which prevented your marriage to Carmela. I now withdraw this opposition. If you still desire to win a woman who is one of the loveliest I have ever seen, come and do so. You will think it hard, perhaps, that the necessity to approach her under a disadvantage—the disadvantage of having once given her up—should have been laid upon you. I can only repeat again that I regret exceedingly my share in the matter; and, to atone as far as

possible, I will by every means in my power make the path of return easy for you. I shall in a few days take Carmela to the city of Mexico. If you wish to do so, come and meet us there. This will be easier than to go to her own home."

There was more in the letter; but it was at this point that Arthur Lestrangle threw it down, with something closely resembling an imprecation on the caprices of women in general and of Mrs. Thorpe in particular. And certainly, from his point of view, he had some excuse for the outraged sense of impatience which possessed him. Had he not given up Carmela at her bidding, thereby playing a very pitiful part from which he had suffered in his vanity as much as in his heart? Had it not cost him a struggle which he disliked to recall, before he was able to forget? And now—now when he *had* forgotten, and when even the name of Mexico had become distasteful to him—this woman bade him go back, take up an outworn romance, and humble himself to ask pardon for a desertion which had been dictated by her! He said to himself that nothing should induce him to do so. What was done was done indeed. He had resigned Carmela because she had desired him to do so, but it was too much to expect that he would return because she now chose to desire him to do that.

"The request is an insult!" he thought, angrily. "Does she think that I am a toy, a tool, to be placed in any humiliating position that may suit her caprice? I will not return to Mexico. Carmela would scorn me if I did, and I should scorn myself. Besides, I have no desire to return. Who can revive the ashes of an extinct passion? There is nothing more dead than the love of yesterday; and my love for Carmela was merely a poetic fancy, inspired by the charm of a rare nature and a rare beauty. It had no foundation in any real sympathy between us. Of a different country, a different religion, an altogether different and provincial social environment, she is certainly not a woman my cooler judgment would choose to marry."

Presently, having expressed these sentiments several times to himself, he began to feel the necessity of expressing them to somebody else; for sympathy was always one of the most urgent needs of his nature. Now there was only one person to whom he could speak with freedom on the subject, and that person was his sister Miriam—although her sympathy was most imperfect. He was well aware that she would say many disagreeable things; but even to listen to these was better than to contain his indignation within his own breast.

The first sentiment which Miriam expressed on hearing his grievance was one of unmixed satisfaction at her own penetration. "How well I read Aunt Elinor that day in the studio!" she said. "It is really a little singular that I should have divined so correctly what was in her mind. I told you, if you remember, almost exactly what she says of the effect Carmela's picture produced upon her."

"I remember that you made some suggestion of the kind," replied Lestrangle; "but the question is, not whether you were right or wrong in a mere guess, but what I can possibly reply to such a letter as that."

"Remembering some things which you said in Mexico," observed Miriam, dryly, "I should think you would be overjoyed at the prospect of returning to Carmela with Aunt Elinor's consent and blessing, not to speak of her fortune."

"Your sarcasm is altogether unnecessary," answered her brother. "To recall the things a man has said when he was in love is like quoting Philip drunk against Philip sober. I have no doubt I uttered a great many foolish speeches in Mexico. I was drunk then; I am sober now. It cost me a severe struggle, whether you believe it or not, to give up Carmela; but I could not think of dragging her down to poverty, not to

‘ speak of dragging down myself. So I *did* give her up; and, not desiring to cherish a thing which would only make me miserable, I forced myself to forget her. And now that I have succeeded—now that she is no more than a memory to me, and a memory associated chiefly with pain,—Mrs. Thorpe writes and graciously invites me to return, revive an extinct passion, and fill the humiliating position of a man who comes to sue for the favor of a woman whom he has once voluntarily resigned.”

“It *is* hard on you,” said Miriam, sympathetically. “The position in which Aunt Elinor places you is certainly a very difficult and disagreeable one. But, however disagreeable, there can be no doubt that your course is clear. If you have ceased to love Carmela, and no longer wish to marry her, you can only write and frankly say so. If Aunt Elinor is disappointed, she can blame no one but herself. With all her caprices, she is too just to blame you.”

“I am not at all sure of that. A woman made up of caprices, as she is, will always blame some one beside herself.”

“She may think that a passion which could be forgotten so easily certainly amounted to little in the first instance,” said Miriam, with unpleasant frankness; but it is impossible that she

could wish you to return under the circumstances. Why should she? Evidently her desire is to gratify you by acceding to what she supposes to be your wishes; and since those wishes have altogether changed, that is an end of the matter."

"Do you read this letter no better than that?" asked Arthur, striking it sharply with his forefinger. "Does she say a word here about consideration of *my* wishes? Does she not plainly intimate, on the contrary, that they need no consideration? Her whole thought is of Carmela. From the time she saw that picture—which I wish I had cut into shreds and destroyed!—she was constantly considering *her*. Did anything else take her to Mexico? And now, in writing this letter, do you suppose she gives a thought to me! If so, the penetration on which you flatter yourself amounts to very little. Read it over, and you will perceive that she is thinking entirely of Carmela. She went there to discover how Carmela was affected, and she wishes me to return solely on Carmela's account."

"Well—what then?"

"This then: that on Carmela's account also she will resent my refusal to do so. Evidently she has taken a violent fancy to this girl,—a fancy as violent as her prejudice was a year ago. By the bye, did you ever hear the reason of that preju-

dice? No?"—as Miriam shook her head—"Well, my mother told me, as a reason why it was hopeless to think of overcoming her opposition. There was once a love affair between herself and Henry Lestrangle. They quarrelled, and he left her and went to Mexico. She never forgave the desertion, and that made her violently opposed to my marriage to Carmela. But observe how the same cause can produce different effects in the mind of a capricious woman. *Now* the halo of the old love affair is evidently about Carmela; and the chances are even that—filled with the idea that she has done the young girl an injury in preventing her marriage to me—she may, if I decline to return, decide to leave her a fortune by way of compensation."

"O Arthur, what an absurd idea?"

"Do you think it absurd? Then you do not know Mrs. Thorpe as well as I do. I tell you that she is fully capable of it. And the question is, therefore, what is it best for me to do?"

"There can be but one thing for you to do," said Miriam, decidedly; "and that is to tell the truth. I assure you that Aunt Elinor is neither so unreasonable nor so capricious as you think. If she is disappointed, she will recognize that it is her own fault; and if she has learned to care for Carmela, she will certainly not wish that she

should marry a man who could forget her in a few months."

"There is no question of marrying Carmela as far as I am concerned, you understand," answered Lestrangle. "But it has occurred to me that perhaps it might be well for me to go to Mexico to see Mrs. Thorpe."

"What could be gained by that? She would think that you came with the object she desires, and she would have a right to be disappointed and angry when she found that instead you had only come to look after your possible interest in her fortune. No, Arthur: some things a man of honor must not do. After the manner of your separation, one thing which you must not do is to voluntarily go where you will meet Carmela again. Your masculine vanity tells you, I am sure, that she still cares for you; and this being so, and you having ceased to care for her, it is positively incumbent on you to stay away and let her forget you as soon as possible."

"I was certain of one thing before speaking to you on this subject, and that was that you would be as disagreeable as possible," said Arthur, with exasperation; "but I find that I did not in the least do justice to your ability in that line. It is the last time that we shall discuss the matter."

"That must be as you like," replied Miriam.

"It is certainly not a subject which it affords me any pleasure to discuss; but I wish you to remember that if you think of going to Mexico under these circumstances, your conduct will be inexcusable, and you will certainly regret it."

"I am the best judge of my conduct," observed Lestrangle, with dignity. "As for regretting it, I certainly regret that I ever went to Mexico at all, so it is likely enough that I may regret this also; but at least Mrs. Thorpe will have no reason to complain because I comply with her request."

"Her request is that you will go to Mexico to renew, if possible, your engagement with Carmela. That you should go for any other purpose is, I am sure, very far from her desire."

It was, as we are well aware, very far from the desire or intention of Lestrangle himself when he first read Mrs. Thorpe's letter; but further consideration, by suggesting the alarming thought that his aunt might be led by the memory of her old romance to make Carmela her heiress, inclined him to compromise and go to Mexico, in order to see for himself how matters stood. Excuses for this course were not wanting, but they had by no means satisfied him; and he needed the final spur of Marian's opposition to make his partial inclination take the form of resolution.

CHAPTER XIX.

AND now, Carmela, where shall we go first—what shall we see first of the many things of interest to be seen in this wonderful city?” asked Mrs. Thorpe, with a smile.

It was the morning after their arrival in Mexico, and they were standing in the brilliant sunshine on the upper gallery of the Hotel del Jardin, overlooking the beautiful garden from which the hotel takes its name, and which was for three centuries the garden of the greatest and most venerated monastery in New Spain. It is the eternal shame and condemnation of the “Liberal” party that the first shrine on which their blows fell and which their cupidity robbed was one which every sentiment of gratitude and patriotism should have induced them to spare. “The history of this foundation,” says a Protestant writer,* “may almost be said to be the history of Mexico: for contained in it, or linked with it, is every event of importance in the colonial or national life. From this centre radiated

* T. A. Janvier.

the commanding influence of the Franciscan Order,—the strong power that kept what was won by military force, and that by its own peaceful methods greatly extended the territorial limits of New Spain. Here Masses were heard by Cortes, and here for a time his bones were laid. Here, through three centuries, the great festivals of the Church were taken part in by the Spanish viceroys. Here was sung the first *Te Deum* in celebration of Mexican Independence. . . . Around no other building in Mexico cluster such associations as are gathered here.”

It is indeed worth while to recall, as one stands upon this spot, that here the little band of saintly monks who are lovingly called the Twelve Apostles of Mexico laid their first foundation, on ground that had been the garden and wild-beast house of the Kings of Tenochtitlan, and from hence sent forth in all directions the missionaries who won a nation to God; and that here Pedro de Gante—one of the greatest and purest Franciscans who ever toiled in the New World—erected the first parish church of the Indians, which formed one of the “Seven Churches of San Francisco,” that, clustered around the central monastery, were famous throughout Mexico for their antiquity, their beauty, and their associations of holiness.

Yet on this magnificent group of sanctuaries, rooted so deep in the national life and endeared by so many claims to the national heart, iconoclastic rage has spent itself in destruction and desecration. As no other shrine in Mexico had such title to veneration, so on no other has such heart-sickening desolation fallen. For here, amid the ruins of this most ancient and famous sanctuary, the sects of Protestantism have made their home. The majestic central church, stripped of all ornaments, its altars gone, itself a sad and piteous picture of desolation, is dishonored by the so-called worship of one group, while others assemble in what is left of the surrounding chapels. Streets have been cut through the ancient monastery, and the Hotel del Jardin is formed of the cloisters, the offices of the commissioners-general of the Order, the infirmary, and the beautiful chapel of San Antonio—now converted into the hotel kitchen! The refectory, “in which was room for five hundred Brothers to sit together at meat,” is now a stable, the picturesque old wall of which bounds the garden on the eastern side. Never was the lesson written more impressively for all the world to read that the godless Revolution, in its rage against religion will play the part of worse than Goth and Vandal, dishonoring its own past, and destroying what is of inestima-

ble value to the scholar, the antiquarian and the artist; for the most historically interesting spot in Mexico—the very cradle of the national life—perished when the barbarous hand of the destroyer fell upon the monastery and churches of San Francisco.

Some of these thoughts were in Carmela's mind; for her eyes had gathered their wistful look as she gazed at the beautiful garden, with its ancient spreading trees, and thought of the brown-robed sons of St. Francis whose footsteps had made it hallowed ground. But at Mrs. Thorpe's words her face brightened, although she hesitated a little in her reply.

"If I might choose," she said, "the place to which I would first wish to go would be to our great national shrine, Guadalupe. But probably there are other places that you wish to see first."

"No," replied Mrs. Thorpe; "there is no place to which I prefer to go. It is true that I know nothing of Guadalupe—or at least very little,—but I shall like to see a place so famous. Therefore we will go there at once."

They immediately descended; Mrs. Thorpe ordered a carriage, and they were soon rolling through the city streets toward the great northern causeway. Once outside the gates, here again vandalism met them—in this instance the van-

dalism of neglect. The magnificent causeway, erected by the Viceroy and Archbishop, Don Fray Payo de Rivera, as a fitting approach to the great shrine, was once adorned by fifteen beautiful, altar-like structures of stone, richly sculptured, and dedicated to the fifteen mysteries of the Rosary. These were set along the road at regular intervals, so that the pilgrims going to Guadalupe and telling their beads by the way could pause before each to say the prayers of the mystery. Almost all of these altars are in ruins; several have totally disappeared; and, worst of all, the railway to Vera Cruz has been suffered to utilize the noble causeway for its track. Nevertheless, it is still a beautiful drive; and spreading far on each side are the green, fertile fields of the Valley of Mexico,—fields which in the days of the Conquest were covered with the now shrunken waters of the great lakes.

It is a short distance—only two and a half miles—from Mexico to the hill of Tepeyácac, where in the early morning of December 9, 1531, the Blessed Virgin appeared to the pious Indian, Juan Diego, as he was on his way to Mass. All the world—at least all the Catholic world—knows the touching story; a story partially repeated many times before and since. But not even Lourdes, with all its marvels, shows more strik-

ingly the tender solicitude of the Mother of God for the humblest of the souls that her Son has saved than this apparition of Guadalupe. And when was a more gracious miracle ever wrought than that which imprinted the likeness of the Queen of Heaven on the blanket of a poor Indian, for the conversion of his race ? *

* For those who do not remember the details of the miracle of Guadalupe, it may be well to give the history of it here, in the words of the chronicler, Fray Agustin de Vetancourt (*tempo* 1672), who thus describes it ;

Juan Diego, a native of Cuahtitlan, who lived with his wife, Lucia Maria, in the town of Tolpetlac, went to hear Mass in the church of Santiago Tlaltelolco on the morning of Saturday, December 9, 1531. As he was near the hill called Tepeyácac he heard the music of angels. Then beheld he, amid splendors, a Lady who spoke to him, directing him to go to the Bishop and tell that it was her will that in that place should be built to her a temple. Upon his knees he listened to her bidding, and then, happy and confused, betook himself to the Bishop with the message that she had given him.

But while the Bishop, Don Juan Zumárraga, heard him with benignity, he could not give credence to the prodigy. With this disconsolate answer he returned, finding there again the Lady, who heard what he had to tell, and bade him come to her again. Therefore on the Sunday ensuing he was at the hillside when she appeared for the third time, and repeated her order that he should convey to the Bishop her command that the temple should be built. The Bishop heard the message still incredulously, and ordered that the Indian should bring some sure sign by which might be shown that what he told was true. And when the Indian departed, the Bishop sent two of his servants to watch

The great basilica in which it has been long shrined is now in process of being remodeled and rebuilt on such a grand scale that it will be, when completed, one of the most magnificent churches in the New World. Meanwhile the picture is placed in the little chapel on the hill, erected to mark the spot where Juan Diego gathered roses at the command of the Blessed Lady who there appeared to him. This hill, like that of Chapultepec, is a volcanic formation, rising abruptly out of the level plain. A broad, graded way, paved and provided with steps, leads from the base of

him secretly; yet as he neared the holy hill he disappeared from the sight of these watchers. Unseen, then, of these he met, the Lady, and told her that he had been required to bring some sure sign of her appearance; and she told him to come again the next day and he should have that sign.

But when he came to his home he found there his uncle, Juan Bernardino, lying very ill with fever. Through the next day he was busy in attendance upon the sick man; but the sickness increased, and early on the morning of December 12 he went to call from Tlaltelolco a confessor. That he might not be delayed in his quest by the Lady's importunity, he went not by the usual path, but by another skirting the eastern side of the hill. But as he passed the hill he saw the Lady coming down to him and heard her calling him. He told her of his errand and of its urgent need for quickness, whereupon she replied that he need not feel further trouble, as already his uncle's illness was cured. Then ordered she him to cut some flowers in that barren hill, and to his amazement he perceived flowers growing there. She charged him to take these miraculous flowers to the Bishop as

the hill to its summit, and ends in a wide platform before the door of the church. Here, covered with stone, stand the mast and yards of a vessel, which, in fulfilment of a vow to Our Lady should she save them from destruction, the crew carried on their shoulders from Vera Cruz, climbing up through rugged mountain passes, higher and higher, until they planted their burden upon the hill of Guadalupe, where it has stood in silent yet eloquent witness of their faith and gratitude for many a long year.

The Capilla del Cerrito (Chapel of the Little

the sign that he had requested; and she commanded that Juan Diego should show them to no other until they were seen of the Bishop's eyes. Therefore he wrapped them in his *tilma*, or blanket, and hastened away. And then from the spot where most holy Mary stood, there gushed forth a spring of water, which now is venerated and is an antidote to infirmities.

Juan Diego waited at the entrance of the Bishop's house until he should come out; and when he appeared, and the flowers were shown him, there was seen the image of the Virgin beautifully painted upon the Indian's *tilma*! The Bishop placed the miraculous picture in his oratory, venerating it greatly; and Juan Diego returned to his home with two servants of the Bishop, where he found that his uncle had been healed of his sickness in the very hour that the lady declared that he was well.

As quickly as possible the Bishop caused a chapel to be built upon the spot where the Blessed Virgin had appeared, and where the miraculous roses had sprung up from the barren rock; and here he placed the holy image on the 7th of February, 1532, and here it has been venerated unto the present time.

Hill) is a small but very charming sanctuary, placed upon the crest of the hill ; and over its altar now hangs the famous and holy picture. It has already been said in these pages that the beauty of this picture appeals alike to the eye of faith and the eye of artistic appreciation. The figure has an incomparable dignity in its pose ; the face is full of tenderness, and the harmonious colors are softened by time only enough to make all copies seem a little crude.

To Carmela the moment when she could kneel before this venerated shrine was one of keenest emotion. Her heart dilated as she looked up at the gentle, bending face, and thought of the miracle which had given it to the world. Nor was hers the only heart touched at this moment. To Mrs. Thorpe the miraculous picture of Guadalupe had been for some time a stumbling block. She had never for one instant believed it to be miraculous ; and her taste, as well as her sense of veracity shrank from what she thought a mere device to secure the conversion of the Indians. She had finally said to herself that perhaps it was allowable under the circumstances ; or that, at least, she would not suffer herself to sit in judgment on a thing of which she knew so little ; but of belief in the supernatural origin of the picture she had not a particle until she stood before it.

Then—who can say how or why?—faith came to her like a flash of light. All doubt left her mind. She forgot, indeed, that she had ever entertained any.

As she looked at the image a miracle scarcely less wonderful than that which had created it took place in her soul. The Mother of Mercy, here on her own chosen hill at Guadalupe, spoke to a mind already open to conviction, a heart which needed only that light of faith which is a pure gift of God. Of what passed in her soul while she knelt in the little chapel, upon the very spot which Mary's feet had pressed, Mrs. Thorpe never spoke; but when in after days people asked her where she had been converted, she always replied, "At Guadalupe." Much process of thought and reasoning and somewhat of partial belief had gone before, but here the divine spark was given, the final irradiating touch of the grace of God.

How long they remained in the chapel neither knew; but when at length they came out, leaving their tall wax tapers burning before Mary's shrine, the beautiful view, second only to that of Chapultepec, burst upon them in all its glory of distance and changing tint. The platform in front of the church is guarded by a stone parapet, which bounds the steep descent of the precipitous hill;

and here the two ladies paused to admire the vast outspread picture. Immediately below lay the little town of Guadalupe, with the great basilica dominating it. Around spread far and wide the smiling plain, in the midst of which lay the wonderful city of the Aztec and the Spaniard, worthy of its romantic history, with its myriad shining domes and splendid towers ; while bounding the valley on all sides were the superb mountain chains, which culminated northward in the great volcanoes, crowned with their eternal snows. What words can describe the marvellous loveliness of this wide scene—the tender green of the spreading valley, the ethereal azure of the distant heights, the gleaming Oriental like city, the shining waters of the lakes, which in the days of the Conquest encircled its walls, and the luminous, dazzling sky ?

Carmela gazed speechless, but Mrs. Thorpe uttered an exclamation of delight. “ I have been all over the world,” she said, “ and I have never seen anything so entrancing ! ”

The sound of her voice and the English words attracted the attention of a man who, standing at a little distance, was leaning over the parapet, with his gaze fixed upon the scene. He turned quickly and looked around, showing a distinctly foreign face. The Mexican sun had indeed

tanned it, but the underlying skin was fair, the hair and beard a soft brown; and frank hazel eyes redeemed from plainness a countenance not otherwise handsome, though eminently pleasant and strikingly intelligent. He glanced at the two ladies, and the next moment strode over quickly to them.

“My dear Mrs. Thorpe!” he said doffing his hat and holding out his hand. “What an unexpected pleasure this is! You are a great traveller I know, yet I should hardly have looked to meet you in Mexico.”

“What!—Mr. Fenwick!” said Mrs. Thorpe, brightening as people do when they meet some one whom they really like. “I am delighted to see you. I think I saw you last in the Champs-Élysées. What a wonderful age this is, when one parts with people one day in Paris and meets them the next day at the antipodes. And how long have you been in Mexico?”

“For a few weeks only. I came for a brief tourist’s run, but I should not be surprised if it lengthened into a much longer stay; for the country enchants me. Why have I been wandering over Europe for years, and neglecting all the picturesqueness and poetry that is here?”

“I have asked myself the same question. Be-

cause of ignorance, is the only answer. You are in the city, of course?"

"For the present. And you?"

"I arrived only last night, and shall probably be here for some time. We do not mean to hurry away—eh, Carmela? My dear, let me present an old friend to you. Mr. Fenwick and I have known each other a long time."

Mr. Fenwick bowed to the beautiful girl, who gave him so sweet a smile, and wondered within himself who she could possibly be. Even as the thought formed in his mind Mrs. Thorpe went on:

"I do not know whether to introduce this young lady as Miss Lestrangle or the Señorita Doña Carmela Lestrangle y Garcia. Either mode would be correct and either somewhat misleading; but she may decide for herself what it shall be."

"Oh, the last, I think," answered Carmela, in her sweet, liquid tones—and Fenwick at once decided that English spoken with a Spanish accent was quite the most charming thing he had ever heard; "for, since I am a Mexican, I should surely be introduced as a Mexican."

"She is half American in blood, however," said Mrs. Thorpe. "Well, the señorita and myself having just arrived, we have everything be-

fore us to enjoy. You can come to see us at the Hotel del Jardin and give us some hints from your experience."

"I am lodging at the Jardin myself, and shall be very happy to do so," returned the gentleman. "Meanwhile can I be of any service at the present time?"

"Thank you, but our carriage waits for us below. This is the first place we have visited. Carmela wished it to be the first."

"Most naturally," said Fenwick. "To a Mexican, what spot is more sacred? Indeed, to any Catholic, it is as interesting as it is holy. This is my third visit here since I have been in Mexico."

"But you," replied Mrs. Thorpe, surveying him with astonishment,—“you are not—”

"A Catholic?" he said, smiling. "Yes: strange as it may seem to you, I am a Catholic."

CHAPTER XX.

"THIS astonishes me exceedingly," said Mrs. Thorpe, as they descended together the broad, many-stepped way which led from the summit to the base of the hill.

"And may I ask why?" observed Fenwick, smiling a little.

"Oh, you know why!" she answered, rather impatiently. "When a man of the world like yourself—a man whom one never supposed likely to give serious thought to such a subject—says that he has embraced a religion which means earnestness, one has a right to be surprised."

"I acknowledge that," he replied, "if you indeed believe me to be without serious thought. But I submit that a man must be almost without a mind who gives no serious thought to a subject, not only of so much importance in itself, but so closely allied to every phase of thought, especially modern thought."

"Yes," she said meditatively, "that is true. One meets it at every turn. It is wonderful—is it not?—how the old faith, that the world for a time fancied to be merely a relic of mediævalism,

existing out of its time, suddenly proves to be the force most alive in all this nineteenth century: in the front of the war of ideas, with a clear and logical answer for every question that is troubling the minds of men."

It was now Fenwick's turn to look at her with something of surprise. "So you, too, have indulged in a little serious thought on the subject?" he remarked. "And I think that with you, as with all intelligent people, the thought tends in one direction."

"To that place where we are told all roads lead?" she said. "Yes, it is true. Rome holds the key to this strange life of ours, or key there is none. I, too, have reached that point. And here is the guide who has helped me along the way"—and she laid her hand on Carmela's shoulder.

"It was because your own interest made the task easy," returned Carmela. "I only told you some very simple truths."

"Simple to those who know," said the young man; "but more difficult than any problem to those who do not know. How hard it is to find one's way to them unassisted, señorita, you can never imagine."

They had by this time reached the bottom of the hill, where stands the column, surmounted

by a statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe, which marks the exact spot of her last appearance, and near which is the lovely Capilla del Pocito (Chapel of the Holy Well), covering the large and beautiful spring that, tradition tells us, sprang up under her gracious feet.

"Have you heard that whoever drinks of this water will certainly return to Mexico, however far he may wander?" said Carmela to her companions, as they approached the statue. "Come, señora, you must drink of it. You"—to Fenwick—"have already done so, I suppose?"

"No," he replied. "I did not know of that virtue, so I have not drank; but I shall at once proceed to do so, and put my return to Mexico beyond a doubt."

They entered the vestibule of the chapel, where the spring fills a large basin; and, taking the chained drinking-cup, Fenwick dipped it into the sparkling water and offered it to Mrs. Thorpe. She made a slight grimace—not over the water but over the cup—and took a draught, after which Fenwick lifted it to his own lips and drank deeply.

"That is settled," he said, in a tone of satisfaction, as he replaced the cup. "However far I may wander, I am now to return to Mexico—thanks to Our Lady of Guadalupe; and also

thanks to you, señorita, since I should certainly have neglected this draught but for your kind information."

Carmela looked at him a little doubtfully, for this seemed to her a very light tone in which to speak of the Holy Well; but the glance which met her own reassured her. It was impossible for any one to look into Fenwick's eyes and not trust as well as like him; for they were almost as expressive and quite as honest as those of a high-bred, sagacious dog.

"You had better come with us," said Mrs. Thorpe to him, when they reached their carriage; "and I am not as disinterested as perhaps I appear in asking you to do so. If you are inclined to play cicerone, you can show us something of what is best worth seeing in Mexico. We neither of us know very much about it."

"I shall be delighted to be of service," answered the young man; but even without that inducement I should not have declined the pleasure of accompanying."

He took the vacant seat in the carriage; and it seemed to Carmela, as they rolled back to Mexico along the broad, level causeway, that, in listening to the conversation of Mrs. Thorpe and himself, a door was opened, giving her a glimpse into a new and attractive life. They were both

people with a wide knowledge of the world, and of its best social and intellectual phases. They had an acquaintance with many places and many people in common, and both possessed more than ordinary culture. Each had a stimulating effect upon the other; and Mrs. Thorpe, who dearly liked clever people as much as she disliked stupid ones, found too much interest in the conversation to notice Carmela.

But Fenwick was not unmindful of the lovely face opposite him, the soft eyes of which expressed so much intelligent appreciation that he found his attention wandering from the subject of the conversation more than once; while he said to himself that he had at first been blind enough to see only the beauty and pass over the deeper *spirituelle* charm of this face. But he was a man of too fine perceptions not to recognize the charm now; and, recognizing, he found it necessary to exercise some self-control to prevent his eyes from seeking too persistently a countenance so interesting and attractive.

Mrs. Thorpe had judged wisely in thinking that he would prove a good cicerone; for he was, in degree at least, the ideal traveller: one who neither moved through famous scenes ignorant of their past history, nor yet primed himself from guide-books with dry facts and figures. He had

not only a knowledge of the past in all its phases, but he had also that deeper knowledge of the spirit of an epoch which is necessary to understanding it. How to possess this knowledge, who can say it? Those who have it possess it almost intuitively, born of that fine sympathy to which "nothing that is human is strange."

It was the possession of this faculty which had led to Fenwick's conversion; for, as an ardent student of history, it had been necessary for him to come as near as possible to understanding past ages; and where, during all the long roll of nineteen centuries, can one approach history without being forced to decide in favor of the claims of the Catholic and Roman Church? Met at every turn by this majestic figure, fascinated yet repelled, admiring yet protesting, he finally decided to grapple once for all with its pretensions and discard or accept them finally. The end was not difficult to foretell. Given a clear intelligence, unwarped by prejudice, an honest soul and an aroused interest, the end in such case can be no more doubtful than the coming of the clear dawn after night.

And so it happened that he was better fitted than the average American or Englishman to understand the past history and present conditions of life in those great provinces of the New

World where Spain planted so deep her civilization and her religion. Where many pass in obtuse ignorance, condemning that of which they understand little or nothing, he comprehended and admired ; and Carmela almost felt as if she had never before known the history of her own country as she heard him speaking of its heroic and picturesque features to Mrs. Thorpe, who much preferred receiving information in this way to seeking it herself.

What remained of the morning, after their return to the city, they spent in the Cathedral, which, built upon the site of the Aztec temple destroyed by the Spaniards, is as interesting in its historical associations as it is magnificent and impressive in appearance,—a fit companion for the splendid cathedrals of Spain, on which it was modelled. Whoever has known those cathedrals might fancy himself transported into one of them as he enters the famous Metropolitan Church of Mexico. Here, as there, the choir, with its richly carved woodwork, its great organs and gilded tribunes, rises in the middle of the nave, like a church within a church, lessening somewhat the general effect of space and majesty, but amply compensating in beauty of detail ; while on each side between the chapels and the lines of columns which support the

beautifully vaulted roof, the long, open aisles furnish vistas sufficiently noble and extended to satisfy the eye. The chapels which encircle the edifice have each their particular claim upon attention and admiration; but their beauty culminates in the superb Chapel of Los Reyes (the Kings) in the transept, where the magnificent churrigueresque altar, extending from the pavement to the lofty roof, is so rich and splendid in effect that one is not surprised to learn that it was executed by the same artist who carved the altar of Los Reyes in the Cathedral of Seville.

Wherever throughout the church the ancient work has been left untouched, it is beautiful and harmonious in the extreme; and it is to be regretted that the hand of the innovator has been allowed to fall upon any part of it. Very unsatisfactory are the modern details—notably the elaborate but tasteless high altar, erected in 1850, and contrasting with the finely-designed gates and walls of the choir opposite; but the whole interior presents to the eye such an imposing picture that criticism is lost in admiration. As in the great sanctuaries of the Old World, so there is nothing here limited or circumscribed, nothing set apart for congregation or class: all is open and free as the sunshine of God, full of the beauty of noble proportion and

space. Down the wide aisles prince and peasant pass on the same footing, and kneel side by side on the pavement before the doors of the chapels, where never-dying tapers burn amid the rich, dim splendors of old carved and gilded altars, of the colors of painting and the glow of precious metals.

"It always strikes me that a sanctuary like this is as Catholic as the soul of the church itself," said Fenwick, as they passed slowly and lingered often around its great circuit. "All the ages meet in it, as do all classes and conditions of men. We pass with one step from the shrine of the Kings who came to worship the Child of Bethlehem, to that of St. Philip of Jesus, the Mexican martyr, who met his death in Japan yesterday. All history is comprehended within these walls, as are all the needs of humanity."

Carmela, who was standing beside the font in which the young Mexican martyr was baptized, looked at the speaker with a glance that seemed to thank him.

"You express clearly what I have felt dimly, señor," she said. "It is true: all the ages are here. Perhaps that is why one's own troubles seem so small when one brings them into the sanctuary. One looks at them in the light of the past—the past which holds the memory of those

who have suffered so much,—as well as in the light of the future, when all suffering will be at an end. Between the two they shrink into nothing.”

“But they have a fashion of expanding again when one goes back to the world,” remarked Fenwick, smiling; while he wondered a little what experience of trouble this soft-eyed maiden could have known. “I am sure you have discovered that, or else you are more fortunate than most people.”

“Oh, yes, I have discovered it!” she said; and then added a little hurriedly, as if anxious to avoid speaking of herself, “I have often wondered what those do who in trouble have no such place of refuge from the world.”

“They do badly, when the time comes for them to need it,” he answered. “But when one has never known a thing, one’s sense of longing for it can only be vague. The religious instincts of people have to be cultivated as well as everything else about them.”

“I am not sure that the longing is so very vague,” said Mrs. Thorpe. She spoke as if to herself, and walked on without waiting for reply; while Carmela knelt down before the Chapel of St. Philip of Jesus, who met so cruel a death and received the glorious crown of martyrdom in the flower of his youth.

The elder lady paused before a shrine a little farther on, shook her head disapprovingly at some of the ornaments, envied the piety of a group praying aloud with absorbed devotion before it, and admired an effect of misty light falling from the high, dim windows over soft, rich tones of color below, before she turned to see if her companions were coming. They were advancing towards her, speaking as they came; and something in the sight of the two figures suddenly suggested an idea which made her start.

"It is possible," she said to herself. "Things of the kind are always possible; and any man might fall in love with Carmela. If it should come to pass, *I* am not accountable, further than that I have been the instrument of Fate—or is it Providence? We shall see."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE little party so unexpectedly formed at Guadalupe became quite inseparable during the days following. Mr. Fenwick also lodged at the Hotel de Jardin, and it was soon his recognized privilege to attend the two ladies on all occasions. A more thoroughly sympathetic and agreeable party it would be difficult to find, as they wandered together through the delightful scenes of the Mexican capital and its environs. They were days to be long remembered by them all—days of such unalloyed pleasure as do not come often in life even to the most fortunate,—but to Fenwick there seemed something almost akin to enchantment in the time. The quaint, beautiful old churches; the flowery plazas, filled with the life of the gentle, courteous and attractive people; the outlying towns, with their romantic stories and picturesque scenes; the Mexican sky, a vast vault of sapphire, the Mexican air, like limpid amber,—all had charmed him when he was alone, but would now remain forever associated in his mind with a presence that was in perfect harmony with such scenes,—

the presence of a girl whose graceful Spanish beauty charmed the eye, whose sympathy never failed, and whose understanding was never at fault.

He was a man who knew the world well, and women perhaps as well as a man can ever know them ; but he had never before met a woman who possessed for him the attraction of this Mexican girl. A little surprised by the fact, he endeavored to analyze the attraction ; but, while he could account for a great deal, some of the finer essence of the charm escaped his process altogether. He could explain to himself that she possessed the most perfect simplicity he had ever known ; that he had never yet surprised her in a look or a tone intended to produce an effect, or which was anything else than an unconscious expression of genuine feeling ; that the nature thus manifested seemed to be of exquisite quality throughout, vibrating like a sensitive instrument to every touch of fine and generous emotion ; that her intelligence was so quick and receptive that it was a pleasure to suggest a new idea to it ; but when all was summed up there still remained something unexplained,—that divine something never possibly to be explained by any process of analysis, which draws one nature to another as irresistibly as the needle is drawn to the magnet ; that mys-

terious spell in a glance, a word, a smile, which makes all the sayings and doings of one person seem harmonious and delightful.

Altogether harmonious and delightful Carmela appeared during these days, not only to Fenwick, but also to Mrs. Thorpe, who found herself becoming more and more attached to the gentle and lovable girl. "He is certainly falling in love with her," thought that astute lady; "and I do not wonder. But what will be the end? Has she forgotten Arthur or has she not? And will he come or will he not? I almost begin to hope not; for Fenwick is the better man of the two,—yes, I must confess that he is certainly the better man of the two. Arthur is very much of a selfish egotist. No doubt I have helped to make him so, and therefore I cannot complain; but he is not good enough for Carmela. I acknowledge that; and if he does not come, and she proves to have forgotten him sufficiently to accept Fenwick, I shall be glad. But *has* she forgotten him? That is the question. I should like to have it answered—and yet I am afraid."

It was about this time—that is, about the time when thoughts like these began to form very serious reflections for Mrs. Thorpe, and she exhibited quite a nervous interest in the list of arrivals published every morning in *The Two Re-*

publics—that Fenwick observed one day, when they chanced to be alone :

“Miss Lestrangle tells me that she has never been out of Mexico. That surprises me a little.”

“Why?” asked Mrs. Thorpe.

“Well, for several reasons. She is so free from anything like provincialism, for one thing ; and, then, in many respects she gives one the idea of a person who has had more intercourse with the world than it appears she has really known.”

“She has had intercourse with *me*,” remarked Mrs. Thorpe. “I represent the world pretty well, do I not?”

“So well,” replied the young man, smiling, “that in such case I can not wonder at the excellence of the result. But may I ask if you have known her long?”

“Not very long, but there is a connection between us. My sister married a cousin of her father, and—and she has known her cousins (whom I think you also know), Miriam and Arthur Lestrangle. Acquaintance with them no doubt helped to produce the effect which surprises you.”

A slight significance in the last words did not escape Fenwick. A sudden vision of Arthur Lestrangle rose before him. He had never known that accomplished gentleman very well or liked

him very cordially ; therefore he had failed to remember his relationship to Mrs. Thorpe and probable connection with Carmela. But now it occurred to him as a little singular that the latter had not up to this time mentioned the name of a man who must have impressed himself very decidedly upon her memory. He began to consider and understand some things which had lately puzzled him. As their acquaintance progressed he had been made to feel that beyond a certain point it was not possible to advance with Carmela. Something stopped him on the threshold of anything like intimacy,—a barrier intangible, yet very distinct. It struck him as an impulse of distrust, a determination to guard some inner citadel of her nature from approach. Now, as if by a flash of inspiration, he divined the reason of this. “She has been disappointed once and she is slow to trust again,” he said to himself. “Perhaps she never will trust thoroughly again. Some natures are like that. Was Arthur Lestrangle the man ? And if so, how did he disappoint her ?”

When he asked himself the question he had no more idea of having any light thrown upon it than Mrs. Thorpe had that the same Arthur Lestrangle would respond to her intimation that he might come and try his fortune once more

with Carmela. She had received no reply to her letter, and she now began to feel quite confident that he would not come. "He has ceased to care for her," she thought; "and he will not risk subjecting his vanity to a possible repulse."

How accurate she was in both of these conclusions we know well, but it was natural that she failed altogether to calculate upon the other motive which was strong enough to influence Mr. Lestrangle's conduct—to wit, the motive of looking after his own interests. Knowing Mrs. Thorpe, as he reflected bitterly, to be made up of whims and caprices, he felt certain, as time went on, that if he failed to put in an appearance in response to her summons, she was capable of any perfidy where her fortune was concerned. It seemed to him horribly probable that some idea of making amends to Carmela for the tyranny which had ended her romance, together with the memory of the other older romance, would point her out as a probable legatee for a portion, or it might even be for the whole, of that fortune. The risk could not be run. Lestrangle felt that he must go and see for himself how matters stood; and if it were absolutely necessary to endeavor to warm again the embers of an extinct passion, why he must try to do so—that was all.

And so it came to pass that one morning when

Mrs. Thorpe's maid brought the coffee and rolls which she always carried to her mistress' bedside before the latter rose, she also announced that Mr. Lestrangle had arrived a short time before, and would be glad to see his aunt when she was ready to receive him.

"Mr. Lestrangle!" repeated Mrs. Thorpe, without any sign of pleasure. "Humph! Tell him that I will see him when I am dressed."

She made no haste to accomplish that result, however; but drank her coffee deliberately, while she reflected upon the situation.

"With the best intentions, I have committed a blunder," she thought. "Things would have gone very well if I had only left them alone. Now there is no telling how they will go. Of course if I could have foreseen that we should meet here one of the most agreeable men I know, and that we should have been having such a remarkably pleasant time, I certainly would not have summoned what can only prove a disturbing element. I have not enjoyed anything as much in years as I have the past fortnight; and there is no doubt that Fenwick is falling in love with Carmela, and there was every chance that she would return the sentiment. But *now* she will be upset, the old fancy will probably revive, Fenwick will have to withdraw, and things will

be very disagreeable altogether, for which I have only myself to thank. This comes of trying to play providence."

Perhaps it was a natural, though not very reasonable, result of playing providence to be somewhat out of humor with the disturbing element she had invoked.

"Well, Arthur," she said, when that gentleman was finally summoned to her presence, "so you have come."

There was nothing of welcome, nothing even of approval, in her tone; and Mr. Lestrangle felt himself at once distinctly aggrieved.

"I have come," he repeated, "in response to what I understood to be your wishes. Have I mistaken them?"

"I don't think that I expressed any wishes," answered Mrs. Thorpe. "I merely made a suggestion. I told you—I felt bound to do *that*—that having seen Carmela, I withdrew my opposition to your desire to marry her; and I said that if you wished to endeavor to renew your engagement with her, you would find us here. You have come—which, frankly speaking, is more than I expected,—so, of course, you do wish to renew your engagement. I cannot blame you for that."

Had Lestrangle been a shade less irritated at finding the most definite intentions attributed to

him, who knew himself to be possessed of the most indefinite, he might have been amused by the tone of the last words. But nothing was further from him than any possibility of amusement. If he had been angry with Mrs. Thorpe before, he felt enraged now. He had taken this journey, and subjected himself to all the embarrassment and annoyance awaiting him at the end of it, to be told that she had not expected him to come! What spirit of caprice, then, had possessed her to summon him?

"It strikes me," he said, very stiffly, "that you have forgotten the substance of a letter which you wrote to me from Guadalajara. From that letter I certainly believed that you desired my presence in Mexico, and it is only in compliance with your desire that I am here now. I must tell you candidly that my own wishes would not have brought me. I had, in fact, a struggle with myself before I was able to come. My return places me in a very painful and embarrassing position. I have no wish to recall the manner in which I was obliged to break off my engagement to Carmela. But I may say that it was not done in such a manner as to make it easy to renew—even if I were disposed to renew it. But I am not at all sure that I am disposed. When a thing of that kind has once been ended, there

is nothing more difficult than to give it fresh life."

"In that case," said Mrs. Thorpe, regarding him calmly, "I confess that I am at a loss to know why you are here. I certainly did not lead you to believe that I desired your presence as a gratification to myself."

"No," he replied; "but you led me to believe that Carmela still cared for me, and therefore that I was bound in honor to come."

"On the contrary," said Mrs. Thorpe, "I told you that I could give you no assurance whatever regarding Carmela's feelings. I only offered you an opportunity to judge of them for yourself, if you cared to do so. It seems you do not care, so I must repeat that I am at a loss to imagine why you have come. As for your being bound in honor, I assure you that I like Carmela too much to permit her to be accepted from a sense of honor, even if she were ready to accept *you*, which I very much doubt."

"If you doubt it," returned Lestrangle, becoming more exasperated, "why did you wish me to come? Was it in order that I might occupy a still more humiliating position than I have already occupied in this matter?"

"You forget yourself altogether when you address me in such a manner," said Mrs. Thorpe,

with dignity. But she kept her temper wonderfully, remembering that her arbitrary conduct, together with his own weakness, had indeed placed the young man in an unenviable position. It was borne in upon her more and more that she had made a great mistake in summoning him. What could be done now to get rid of him?

"I beg your pardon," said Lestrangle, who felt that he had gone a little too far. "I have no doubt you meant to act for the best, but the mistake you made was in supposing that a matter like this could be taken up again just where it was dropped. You do not consider all the changed feelings that have been brought into it, all that has tarnished and spoiled the romance and transformed it into a disagreeable memory."

"If that is the case," she said quietly, "I really think that the best thing you can do is to go away at once. You can leave this hotel immediately, and Mexico by the evening train; so that Carmela need not know that you have been here at all. That, I think, will be best for everyone concerned, under the circumstances."

She looked at him as if expecting him to agree with her and take his departure at once; but Lestrangle was not a little startled by the proposal, and suddenly felt that he had let his irritation make him forget the chief object he had in

coming. That object would be entirely neglected if he allowed himself to be dismissed in this summary fashion.

"I do not agree with you," he said, after a moment of surprise. "Such a retreat would be foolish and undignified. Having come, I certainly wish to learn how Carmela regards the matter, and also to have an opportunity to set myself right with her. Therefore, for a few days, at any rate, I shall remain."

"Very well," said Mrs. Thorpe, rather snappishly. "If you intend to remain, I must go and let Carmela know that you are here. I am afraid that it will not be a pleasant surprise to her."

CHAPTER XXII.

MRS. THORPE went to Carmela's room with some inward trepidation; and it was a relief to her to find that Maria, the maid, had anticipated her with the news of Lestrangle's arrival. Carmela received her very quietly, but there was a dilated look in the large, liquid eyes, which showed that the news had affected her powerfully. It was characteristic of her, however, that as soon as Mrs. Thorpe mentioned Lestrangle's name, she went at once simply and directly to the point.

"Why has he come?" she asked.

Mrs. Thorpe hesitated for a moment before replying. Whether or not to speak the truth she did not know. But there was something in Carmela's directness which seemed to make a like directness alone possible.

"He has come to see you," she answered, somewhat to her own surprise. "I told him that I thought it would be well. Carmela, if any one is to be blamed, you must blame me."

"Why should I blame you?" asked Carmela. "You meant it for kindness, is it not so? But if

you had asked me, I should have said no, it was not well for him to come. Why should he come, since all has long been over between us?"

"But such things are sometimes brought about again, when—when people come together," said Mrs. Thorpe. "Carmela," she added, almost entreatingly, "let me speak frankly to you on this subject for once. You know, I think, that it was owing to me that Arthur acted toward you as he did. I was very much opposed to his marrying you—sometime I will tell you why,—and I said that if he persisted I would leave my fortune away from him. This was enough to make his parents refuse their consent, a formality on which it seems that *your* parents insisted. Under these circumstances he felt that he could do nothing else than give up his claim on you. A braver and more determined man might have persisted, but Arthur was never the one or the other; and certainly he had very little to offer you. I am the person chiefly accountable for all that you suffered in the matter, and I want you to understand this clearly; so that, if your heart still speaks in his favor, you may not refuse to listen to it on account of pride or indignation. For some time I have felt that I owed reparation for my arbitrary conduct in the matter, both to him and to you; so I thought that the best thing I could do

was to tell him to come, in order that you could decide what was best for your happiness. I assure you that my first consideration in the matter was your happiness, so you must forgive me if I have made a mistake."

Very few people had ever heard from Mrs. Thorpe such tones as those with which she uttered these words, or seen in her usually cold eyes such a look as that which she bent on Carmela. Perhaps the latter felt how great was the effort which this speech cost; or perhaps it was only that she was touched, as a generous nature quickly is, by the attempt to atone for a wrong. At all events, she bent forward and laid her hand caressingly on that of Mrs. Thorpe.

"Dearest Señora," she said, "do not speak in this manner. I have nothing to forgive. You have never been anything but kind to me since you have known me, and before you knew me how could you tell what I was? It was surely natural that you should not have wished your nephew to marry a stranger, a foreigner—one of whom you knew nothing. And now it is your kindness that has made you send for him. If you had asked me, I should have told you not to do it; but, since it is done, do not think I could blame you for what was meant for my happiness."

"But why, if I had asked, would you have told

me not to do it?" inquired Mrs. Thorpe, anxious for light upon the subject. "Carmela, do you not care for him now?"

Carmela was silent for a moment before she replied. It seemed as if she were trying to clear her thoughts and find the right language in which to embody them. When she spoke it was very quietly and gently.

"No," she answered, "I do not care for him now—not as you mean. But I am afraid of the power of the past. I am afraid that when I see him something may revive of the feeling that was once so strong and so terrible. Are you surprised that I call it terrible, Señora? But you do not know, nor could I ever tell you, all that I suffered in conquering it. For I had either to conquer it or to die. God helped me, and after a time the burning pain here"—she clasped her hands over her heart—"passed away, and I felt like one who comes out of fever and madness to sanity again. The world was indeed, a different world to me; but I understood that God ordered all things, and that what He had ordered in this was for the best. And so peace came again. But I remember—O I remember well!—all that I suffered, and I would do anything sooner than run the risk of renewing that suffering. So, if you will not think me unkind and ungrateful, I

should be glad if you would send me back to Guadalajara at once."

There was no doubt of the genuineness of this entreaty. The look in the large, dark eyes was enough to prove it, even if Mrs. Thorpe had not learned by this time that Carmela never said or did anything for effect, but only to express her thoughts or feelings. The elder woman was not only surprised: she was struck with a keen pity, with remorse, and with a sense that she had touched matters which were far beyond any power of hers to arrange or mend. She remained silent for a few moments, and then she said, quite humbly:

"My dear, I have made a great mistake, and I wish most heartily that I had consulted you before taking any step in the matter. But how could I imagine that you looked at this thing so—so differently from the manner in which most people would regard it? But what you have said makes me realize deeply what you suffered, and I shall have no comfort until I can in some way atone for my share in causing that suffering."

"Dear Señora," answered the girl, "I wish I could make you believe that you have nothing, absolutely nothing, with which to reproach yourself. But I am like one who has been burned. I shrink from the flames that scorched me,—from

the possibility of renewing so much passionate feeling. So you will let me go, will you not?"

"No," replied Mrs. Thorpe, decidedly; "but, if you desire it, I will send Arthur away, and you need not even see him. Listen to me, however, for one moment before you decide that this shall be done. I want to tell you a story which I have never told to any one else,—a story that explains why I was prejudiced against you, and that also may contain a lesson for yourself." Then she related briefly that early and only romance of her life, of which Henry Lestrangle had been the hero.

Carmela listened with an interest that for the time banished the thought of her own story. The breath came quickly through her parted lips; she was filled with that sense of pathetic compassion and wonder with which we first realize that the griefs we have fancied peculiarly our own are, in fact, as old as humanity; and that along the very path where our feet are faltering, the feet of our immediate predecessors in life have painfully trod. Such things have power to touch even the unimaginative; but when it is the imaginative nature, with all its quick sensibility, its power of entering into the lives and feelings of others, which listens, the effect is sometimes overpowering. With Carmela it was so great that it seemed almost

beyond her power of expression ; but when she attempted to speak Mrs. Thorpe lifted her hand with a silencing gesture.

“Wait,” she said. “I have told you the story, and now I must draw its moral. Carmela, it was anger and pride that kept your father and myself separated ; that, like an entering wedge, drove us finally so far apart that no reconciliation was ever possible on earth. Now, my dear, that old sin of ours has already worked harm enough to your life. I do not want it to work any more. And so I warn you, do not make any mistake about *your* heart : do not fancy that wounded pride, or even just resentment, is the end of love. Love, when it has once truly existed, is very hard to kill. I do not think yours for Arthur Lestrangle can be dead, or else you would not fear to meet him. If you have ceased to care for him what power would he have over you ? Why do you shrink so much from seeing him ? Now, dear, answer these questions to yourself, if not to me, before it is too late.”

“There is no reason why I should not answer them to you,” Carmela replied. “If I shrink from seeing Señor Lestrangle it is because his presence would rouse so many painful recollections, and because the memory of those past feelings is terrible to me. You say that if I did not still care

for him he would have no power to affect me. That, I think, is a mistake. It is not what I feel in the present, but what I have felt and suffered in the past, that gives him that power. I do not believe it possible that what I once felt could ever be awakened again; but if there were the least danger of it, I would fly to the end of the world to avoid it. That I confess."

"But why," persisted Mrs. Thorpe, "do you not think it possible that what you once felt could be awakened again? After all, Arthur has not been guilty of any offence which love would find it hard to forgive."

The girl spread out her hands with a quick little gesture common to her people. "How can I tell?" she said. "One does not reason on these things: one only feels them. I suppose that what I felt for him had no deep and real foundation. Padre Agustin was wise. He said to me—not at first but afterward: 'What you have known has been a fascination, a passion; but not that love which is strong as death, because it is founded on trust and respect and mutual love of God.' I suppose that was true; for when the passion, like fire, died out, nothing remained but the memory of bitterness and pain. I tell you all this, Señora, that you may understand everything, and not mistake me."

Mrs. Thorpe meditated for a moment before she replied: "I am sure that you have told me exactly what you believe, but we are not always the best judges of ourselves in these matters. As I have said, I will, if you desire it, send Arthur away at once—"

"No, no," Carmela interposed; "let *me* go, I beg of you!"

Again Mrs. Thorpe lifted her hand with a silencing gesture. "That," she said, "is not possible. In the first place, what do *I* want with Arthur Lestrangle? I sent for him for a purpose; and if that purpose is a failure, the sooner he goes the better. I shall certainly not allow him to deprive me of you, who are the most agreeable and sympathetic companion I have known in years. If it is necessary in order to retain you, I will send him away; but my advice to you is to see him. I am an old woman, my dear; and I have seen much of the world and of the tricks of those queer things we call hearts. It is impossible for you to be sure of yourself and of what you really feel toward him until you see him. After that you can be sure. My earnest advice to you, then, is to see him. But, of course, I shall not insist upon it."

There was a pause of several minutes. It was evident that Carmela had a strong struggle with

herself, but she had been trained in that renunciation of the will which is the first essential of Catholic piety; and where a young girl without this training would have been immovable, she yielded, although what was asked of her possessed a bitterness far beyond the knowledge of the person asking it.

"Since you are so sure it is best, Señora, I will do what you ask," she said, a little sadly. "I certainly do not wish you to send your nephew away as soon as he has come. After all, we must not avoid things because they are difficult or painful, if it is necessary or even well that they should be done. So I will meet Señor Lestrangle—but *Madre de Dios* help me, for I would rather die!"

She uttered the last words involuntarily in a lower tone, as if to herself, so that Mrs. Thorpe was able to turn a deaf ear, although a pang shot through her heart. But she had at this moment the spirit of the surgeon, who probes deep in order to discover whether a wound is mortal or not. An instinct told her that much for Carmela depended on her course at present. If she were allowed to shrink from the meeting with Lestrangle, she might to the end of her life continue to believe that her wound had been mortal, and that much beside love for him had perished in the flames that had scorched her. But if she saw him

one of two things would follow : either she would find that she had not ceased to love him—and this Mrs. Thorpe was now inclined to believe,—or with a final end of *his* power would also cease that power of the past, which, if unbroken, might continue to stand between the girl's heart and the possibility of any other love. A thought of Fenwick rose in the mind of the lady, who had become his stanch friend.

“The first thing that I want to secure is Carmela's happiness,” she said to herself. “Arthur will probably fall in love with her again as soon as he sees her, but Mr. Fenwick shall have his chance. I am determined on that, and I believe that this is the best way to give it to him. It is certainly the best way to make things clear without mistake in a short time.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

"CARMELA has consented to see you," said Mrs. Thorpe, returning to her nephew; "but I assure you that I had difficulty in inducing her to do so. She is no more anxious than yourself, apparently, to revive the past."

"Indeed!" remarked Lestrangle. There was a tone of pique very perceptible in his voice, and a wave of color mounted quickly to his fair face. To be reluctant to see Carmela himself was one thing, but for Carmela to be reluctant to see *him* was quite another. The last idea did not please him at all. "I hope," he added, a little stiffly, "that you did not urge anything on my behalf; I mean that you did not represent me—"

"As anxious to see her? Not at all," replied Mrs. Thorpe, dryly. "I did not mention your sentiments at all. I simply told her that you were here, that I had sent for you, and that she must blame me for the mistake—since it seems that it is an undoubted mistake. She spoke of returning to Guadalajara, but finally agreed to see you in deference to my wishes."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Lestrangle again, with the

accent of pique very much accentuated. "You might have assured her that she need not fear any annoyance from me," he added rather haughtily; "although it is natural, I suppose, that she should be deeply offended with me."

"I do not think that she is offended at all," answered Mrs. Thorpe. "She told me that she simply wished to go, in order to avoid the revival of disagreeable memories."

Whether or not the speaker intended to make every word that she uttered a barb to the vanity of her listener, it is at least certain that she succeeded admirably in doing so. The last words in particular stung him deeply. "*Painful memories*" would have had no such effect, but "*disagreeable*—" That anything connected with himself could become disagreeable was a suggestion that his self-love indignantly resented.

"I wish," he said, "that you would be kind enough to tell her—" and then stopped short, for in the open door Carmela stood.

It is a peculiar characteristic of real beauty, as distinguished from prettiness or fine looks of any degree, that it always strikes the beholder with a sense of surprise. It is impossible to carry in the memory all the delicacy of tint and perfection of outline which go to form this rare gift, however well known the face possessing it may be. It can

be said, indeed, that there is a continual surprise in such beauty, even when seen constantly ; but after any interval of absence the effect is very striking, and may serve as a test of its perfection. So now Carmela's beauty struck upon Lestrangle's artistic sense as a sudden exquisite harmony in music would strike the ear of a musician, and thrilled him in like manner. Had he, indeed, forgotten the delicate details of this rare loveliness ? or had it gained, in the interval since he saw it last, something which it had lacked before ? Did not the classic head lift itself with a more assured and stately grace ? were not the dark eyes less wistful and more calmly luminous in their full-orbed beauty ? while the tender lips—had they not gained a firmer and nobler curve ? So quick is thought that he had time to ask himself these questions, while Carmela advanced with quiet ease toward him. In this unexpected ease there was something which deprived him of his own ; and when they met, it was she who spoke first.

“ You are welcome back to Mexico, my cousin. I hope that you are well.”

A young princess could not have been more gracious : but there was a tinge of aloofness in the tone which his ear was quick to catch. It contained no echo of that coldness which is the result

of resentment, but rather marked the absence of the cordial pleasure which attends the meeting of friends. She was kindly courteous to him, as to all men ; but she made no pretence of welcoming him as she would have welcomed one whom she was glad to see.

The consciousness of this, as well as surprise at her self-possession, produced in him a degree of embarrassment which astonished Mrs. Thorpe ; for it was very seldom that anything ever rendered Arthur awkward or ill at ease. But now he was certainly both. He murmured a few scarcely audible words in reply to Carmela's greeting, and it was not until they sat down that he remembered himself sufficiently to hope that her family were well.

" They were very well when I heard from them," she answered ; " but I have been away from home for some time. The señora, your aunt, has been very kind. She has given me the great pleasure of seeing Mexico, and we have been here now for two or three weeks."

" *I* should say that Carmela was kind enough to give me the pleasure of her companionship, without which I should not have cared to come to Mexico," said Mrs. Thorpe, whose wonder grew at the girl's demeanor, and who thought that she had never before suspected what strength might

lie in the depths of this nature which seemed on the surface so gentle and pliant.

But only those who have had to make strong efforts to meet and endure things painful and repugnant know how much of sustaining strength there is in the very effort. So Carmela found it now. Having nerved herself, with many an earnest prayer, to the point of the meeting from which she shrank so much, her spirit rose to meet the occasion with a power and a calmness which surprised herself almost as much as its outward manifestation surprised Lestrangle. Instead of being overpowered, as she had feared, by old memories, and perhaps by the attraction that had once swayed her whole being, she found that she had risen to a height where these things had no such power to effect her as she had imagined they might possess. The long discipline of suffering, of struggle and of prayer had not been in vain. By those painful steps she had mounted to the plane where her soul now possessed itself in a tranquillity that was drawn from a deep, inward fount of strength.

Yet it is not to be supposed that she could meet Arthur Lestrangle without a vivid memory of the past, and especially of their last meeting. As their hands and glances met, she recalled, with an intensity which almost seemed to banish

the present moment, the last time they had been together—the parting in her cousin's house, the pain, the tears, the promises. A sudden vision rose before her of the garden where she had read his letter; she saw the well, the banana trees, and the shining evening-star in the soft-tinted sky. And it was an astonishment to herself that these piercing recollections did not overwhelm her. On the contrary, they seemed to give an assurance of strength “that equalled her desire.”

As she looked at him with a gaze that did not waver, Lestrangle understood little of all that was expressed in the dark eyes, of which only the beauty and the wonderful calmness struck him. But he understood at least so much—that this was not the girl who had flushed and paled under his glance, and whom his words had power to sway like a reed. He had expected agitation in one form or another, remembering well how the mere sight of him had been sufficient to move her when they met last; and the entire absence of it was far from flattering to his self-love. A much duller man must have felt that the power which it had been so pleasant for him to use was over, and the realization cost him a pang for which he was wholly unprepared. Was it due to wounded vanity alone, or did the old sentiment

stir under the mingled spell of the beauty he had forgotten and the forgetfulness which stung him? It is at least certain that the desire to revive and use again his apparently lost power at once awakened within him; and he determined, as he met Carmela's quiet glance, that her eyes should once more sink beneath his in the old fashion—for what end he did not pause to ask himself now, any more than he had paused then.

Meanwhile Mrs. Thorpe went on speaking, anxious to relieve as much as possible the constraint of this first meeting.

"We have been very fortunate also, Carmela and I, in having found a charming escort and guide. You know Mr. Fenwick, I believe, Arthur; but I don't suppose you know him very well. I did not until we encountered him here, and I find him one of the most companionable and agreeable men I have ever known."

"Fenwick!" repeated Arthur, a little absently. "Oh yes, I know him; but I certainly never found him very charming or companionable. In fact, he always struck me as something of a prig, than which there is no more disagreeable character in the world."

"That is a proof of how little you know him," said Mrs. Thorpe. "He has not a single characteristic of the prig—unless it is characteristic of a

prig to be particularly well informed, obliging, sympathetic, and altogether delightful."

"He has certainly been playing guide, philosopher and friend to some purpose, since he has made you so enthusiastic about him," answered Lestrangle, lifting his eyebrows. A quick suspicion dawned upon him as he looked at Carmela. Had he been supplanted in her interest by this new acquaintance, and was that the secret of the self-possession which piqued him? A man with little constancy, or conception thereof, in his own nature, is always quick to think these things. He suddenly felt that he would like to see Fenwick; and, as if in answer to the thought, Fenwick appeared on the gallery outside the open door. It was his custom to join the two ladies in Mrs. Thorpe's sitting-room every morning; and although he had delayed his appearance this morning, having heard of Lestrangle's arrival, he could not omit it altogether, especially since an excursion for the day had been arranged on the preceding evening.

Mrs. Thorpe greeted him warmly, hailing his advent as a relief. "Good-morning, Mr. Fenwick!" she cried. "Do come in! We have just been speaking of you, and I was beginning to wonder why you were so late. You know my nephew, Mr. Lestrangle, I believe?"

The two men shook hands with the cordiality of acquaintances who know little of each other, but who have been accustomed to meet in the same order of society. And if with Fenwick the cordiality was of an extremely surface nature he could hardly be blamed. He had already said to himself that he understood why Lestrangle had come; and that not only were all his pleasant days over—the pleasant wanderings through beautiful scenes without any disturbing influence to mar their pleasure,—but that he should soon feel himself *de trop*. He was sure now that his instinct with regard to Carmela had been correct. There was evidently some sort of an understanding between herself and Arthur; and evidently also this accounted for the manner in which she guarded from any intrusion that inner life of hers, where no doubt his image was already enshrined. “He is made to captivate a girl’s fancy,” thought Fenwick, scanning the young man’s handsome, languid face. “I only wish I were sure that he is worthy of it.” Then, almost unconsciously, he sighed a little. Worthy or not, what did it matter? The thing was plainly accomplished; and for him there was nothing to do but, after a short interval, to take himself away, with a somewhat sore heart, and the remembrance of a period of short, exquisite, evanescent enjoyment, and of

a nature which had seemed to him altogether gracious and lovely.

It was with this melancholy view of things that he joined the party. There the first thing which surprised him was Carmela's face. He saw in it at once traces of emotion, such as would have escaped a less penetrating eye; but he saw no sign of the radiance he had expected,—that radiance which shines unmistakably through all disguises from human eyes and lips when a great joy is in the heart. If there was any joy in Carmela's heart, there was at least no reflection of it in the sensitive countenance, which was formed to express all emotions. And this puzzled the observer a little.

"Mr. Fenwick has been kindly acting as our cicerone since we were fortunate enough to meet him," said Mrs. Thorpe, addressing her nephew; "and he has taken us to many curious and beautiful places, which ordinary tourists are apt to overlook altogether. We have arranged for to-day an excursion to—what is the name of the place, Mr. Fenwick?"

"Coyoacan and the Pedrigal," replied Fenwick, smiling. "I do not wonder that your memory should decline to be burdened with such names. I found them difficult at first; but, then, I rather like to overcome difficulties."

"Of what order?" asked Lestrangle, looking at him with a slightly satirical expression. "Your liking is not comprehensive enough to include *all* difficulties, surely?"

"Why not?" returned Fenwick, carelessly. "Is there anything in the world worth possessing which can be obtained without difficulty? And would we value it if we could so obtain it? Every element of knowledge comes to us painfully, and is more valued for the pain it has cost."

"Don't make your assertions quite so general," said Lestrangle. "Every one is not possessed of such praiseworthy sentiments. For myself, I frankly confess that whatever is associated with pain or difficulty becomes odious to me."

"You were always an epicurean, Arthur, and I fear that you always will be," interposed Mrs. Thorpe, a little sharply. "But, instead of discussing abstract questions, suppose you decide whether or not you will accompany us to-day."

"What else have I to do?" he asked. "Do you suppose I have come to Mexico to spend even one day in solitary meditations?"

"Then the sooner we start the better," said Mrs. Thorpe, briskly. "What tramway do we take, Mr. Fenwick?"

"That to San Angel," replied Fenwick. "The cars pass the door of this hotel."

“ We will go and look out for them at once,” said Mrs. Thorpe, rising with a sense of relief, which was certainly shared by every member of the party, as they followed her from the room.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IT seemed to be natural that Mrs. Thorpe should take possession of her nephew, and that Carmela and Fenwick should fall together, as they waited at the entrance of the hotel for the San Angel car, and, when it finally arrived, took their places in it. The girl strove to appear as usual, and with a success that would have deceived any one less sensitive to others' moods than the man beside her. But he felt by instinct, rather than perceived from any outward sign, that her interest in the expedition which yesterday had been so vivid, was now entirely vanished, and wished that it were in his power to spare her the effort she was making. That being impossible, however, the next best thing was to ignore it : and so he endeavored to talk as usual.

"We must stop at San Angel," he said ; "because it is a very pretty little town, built on a hillside, in the midst of gardens, not so large and well-kept as those at Tacubaya, but very charming nevertheless. It commands a beautiful view, and has, what will interest you most, a very picturesque old monastery : deserted

now, of course, but once filled with Carmelite monks."

"Yes, I shall like that," she replied; "although there is as much pain as pleasure in seeing such places. One feels the desolation so keenly—knowing all that it means for our unhappy country, and fearing that it must draw down the punishment of God upon us."

"If the punishment falls on the despoilers, you need not mourn," he said. "And I think the wonderful devotion of the Mexican people, deprived as they are of all such institutions and aids to piety, is enough to turn aside the anger of God from the country *as* a country. For myself," he added, after a slight pause, "I do not feel much depression in such places. Indignation against the robbery, the violation of all human as well as divine rights—yes, but no more than that. For I have been in many parts of the world; and, viewing it as a whole, one sees that what the Church loses in one place she is always in process of gaining in another. Three hundred years ago, when the New World was discovered, millions of souls brought into the fold, and these great foundations laid, all Northern Europe was in revolt against faith; there was a tempest of destruction, in which abbeys, convents, churches and cathedrals fell, and religious were driven

forth by the scourge of penal laws. To-day, while Latin Europe is taking its turn at persecution, and Mexico, led by the same anti-Christian influences, is servilely following the example, the power of the Church is growing in a manner to astonish all men in the lands that cast it out. On their ancient foundation stones the abbeys of England are rising once more ; and all the religious orders have their homes in peace and security there, where so short a time ago it was death to say or to hear Mass. So be comforted amid *your* ruins. It is only a question of time when they, too, shall rise in fresh splendor, and the monks who were driven out come calmly back to resume their work. These temporary vicissitudes count for nothing in the life of an undying power."

He spoke at such length chiefly to divert her mind, and he was rewarded by the gleam of interest and brightness in her eyes.

"Such thoughts as those do comfort me," she said. "But there seems a special ingratitude in the fact that Mexico should repay in this manner those who did all for her: who saved the people from destruction, taught them religion, educated them in civilization, and made them what they are to-day—a people able to take their place among the nations of the earth."

"The ingratitude of Mexico only strikes you

more because the benefit has been more recently received," he replied. "The nations of Europe owe all that they are to-day to the Church. They, too, were savage tribes when she first laid her hand upon them."

"Allow me an observation," said Lestrangle, suddenly interposing. He was seated with Mrs. Thorpe opposite to these two, and had listened to their conversation because curious to know what topic interested them so much. "You forget the classic civilization which has never died in Europe. The literature of Greece and the laws of Rome are the foundations of our modern civilization."

"And who preserved both?" asked Fenwick. "Everyone who knows anything of history knows that it was the Church. But for her you would not possess a fragment of either. Classic civilization would be the vaguest of human traditions but for the learning and care of the cloisters of the Middle Ages."

"Is it possible," said Lestrangle, staring a little, "that you are a Roman Catholic yourself, or are you only one of the people who are just now finding a great deal to admire in that religion?"

"I might describe myself as both," replied Fenwick; "but, to speak more correctly, from the one I have developed into the other. I

began by finding a great deal to admire in the Church, and I have ended by entering it."

"When?" asked Lestrangle, with a quick glance at Carmela.

Fenwick looked a little surprised by the abrupt question. "A year ago I was received into the Church in Rome," he answered. It displeased him to be forced to speak in this manner of anything so personal to himself; and turning with a decided movement to his companion, he began to talk of the country through which they were passing,—a very beautiful country, full of picturesque features; while Lestrangle, relapsing into silence, said to himself that *if* he were disposed to attempt to renew his relations with Carmela, Fate had sent a formidable rival across his path. He knew what the girl's religion was to her: he knew how it had stood like a rock between them on more than one occasion: and he felt sure that a man who possessed in common with her the faith which she valued so highly, would hold a great advantage over one who was alien to it. But, then, he reminded himself that it was nothing to him. He had *not* come to renew his suit to her, and what Fenwick might or might not be was surely a matter of no importance to him.

They soon reached the little town of San

Angel, distant five or six miles from Mexico—a pretty place, as Fenwick had said ; now somewhat declined in prosperity, but all the more attractive for this fact. Anything more charming to the artistic eye than these delightful Mexican towns with their Old-World aspect, their mingled resemblance to Spain and the Orient, it is impossible to imagine. Wandering through them—through the narrow ways, the pillared arcades ; the flowery plazas, where picturesque groups gather around the flowing fountains ; the flat, Moorish-looking houses, enclosing courts full of bloom and fragrance ; the noble, richly sculptured and decorated churches,—it is difficult to believe that one is on the same side of the ocean as the rushing country with its feverish life, its oppressive newness, and its air of whitewash and progress across the Rio Grande.

“By Jove, I had forgotten how charming it all is !” said Lestrangle, as they passed along streets where every step revealed a new picture, with glimpses through barred gateways of luxuriant gardens, and vistas in which beautiful tiled domes rose against a sky of flawless turquoise.

But the acme of picturesqueness was reached when they came to the deserted monastery, to which the handsome church possessing these domes was formerly attached. Like numbers of

others throughout Mexico, this monastery, once the home of piety and learning, the centre of wide usefulness, and the place where prayer and supplication rose unceasingly to God, is now falling into decay. But it is a decay as full of beauty as of sadness. Designed in 1516 by Fray Andrés de San Miguel, of the Carmelite Order, at that time held to be the first architect in New Spain, all that remains of the extensive buildings testify to the noble harmony of their original design, and the fine sincerity which characterized the work of an age that did not know the meaning of sham. Every springing arch is full of grace, every elaborate capital wrought with loving care; the solid, stately walls seem built for eternity; in every detail the genius of the artist is shown, together with the skill and thoroughness of the workman.

Passing through the silent cloisters, where the sunshine seemed to fall with a golden pathos, and the cool, deep shadow of the arches to hold the memory of quiet, meditative forms, the little party found themselves in the ancient refectory, where half-effaced frescoes looked down upon them from the walls; and thence emerged on a terrace overlooking a garden, once kept with loving care, and now a wilderness of trees, shrubs and flowers, growing with wild luxuriance. But

beautiful though it is, this deserted, lonely spot, the group on the terrace had eyes only for the magical loveliness of the far-extended view which burst upon them. Miles of green fields, of orchards, and gardens, interspersed with villages, and with the noble tower of the church of Coyoacan rising out of embowering verdure in the middle distance, spread to where the great amethyst-tinted mountains lifted their crowns of eternal snow against the luminous sky.

"What an eye for the picturesque those old monks must have had!" said Lestrangle. "I have seen few lovelier views of this valley of Mexico, which Cortes declared to be *la cosa mas hermosa en el mundo*." *

"Was it not Ruskin who said that he would not come to America because it was a country without ruins?" said Mrs. Thorpe. "Some one ought to have told him of Mexico. Here he would have found ruins beautiful enough to have satisfied him."

"It is rather difficult to maintain one's self in sentiments of charity toward those who made them," remarked Fenwick. And then, meeting Carmela's glance, he smiled. "You see," he

* "The most beautiful thing in the world."

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added, "I need to remind myself of all that I was saying to you."

"I have been remembering it ever since we entered here," she answered; "but it is hard to see all this desolation, and harder yet to think that within the borders of Catholic Mexico men and women are no longer free to devote themselves to God. I think that I should like to be a Carmelite above all things," she said, in a low voice, as if to herself.

Fenwick started, and felt something like a sudden chill. Here, in the old monastery precincts, a vision rose before him of that life of Carmel, so terrible in the eyes of the world because so elevated above all things which the world knows or loves; so remote from things of sense, so mystical, so spiritual, so high on the rugged way which leads to God. Few persons brought up in Protestantism do not shrink from that severely contemplative and sacrificial life, of which Carmel is the supreme expression; and even with some Catholics there is a feeling that the cheerful working orders, that live in the world and do not carry things to such austere extremes, are to be preferred to those who climb the steep and lonely eminence, where, like the prophets of old, Carmel makes intercession with Almighty God for a guilty world.

Perhaps it was some remnant of his Protestant training which caused Fenwick's chill, or perhaps an unguessed strength in his feeling for the young girl. At least he said quickly: "Why do you talk in that manner? Are you so disgusted with the world that you wish to go and bury yourself in a cloister?"

She was surprised by his tone. The shade of impatience in it was not lost on her ear, and the want of sympathy made her feel how she had come to expect sympathy from him. But she answered quietly:

"I do not know whether or not it is what you call disgust of the world which makes one feel that there is nothing satisfying in it—nothing that can fill our hearts or make them constant; even for the shortest time. Nothing which gives lasting happiness, or repays one for the pain of which life is so full,—but if so, it is, I think, a feeling which in all ages has sent people to the cloister."

"But not that alone," said Fenwick. "It seems that I am destined to preach to you to-day. It is not a *rôle* that I particularly fancy, but I must remind you that dissatisfaction at finding the world a place full of disappointment and pain could hardly constitute a vocation for the cloister."

"I did not mean that it alone would do so," she replied. "I only meant that to feel what the world is makes one turn involuntarily to the thought of the higher life, and to a desire to seek shelter in its peace."

The last words seemed to give him the key to her meaning. He looked at her for a moment with an intentness of which he was not himself conscious, trying to reconcile his preconceived ideas with those which her words suggested. She did not avoid his gaze; and deep in the depths of her clear, beautiful eyes he saw a sadness which accorded with her utterances. What it meant he did not understand, but intuitive sympathy made him answer, gently:

"Believe me, you do not yet know all that is to be known of the world. It is true that the pain and disappointment of which you have spoken are to be found in it everywhere, more or less pervading every human lot; but there are many compensations for these things—the sweetness of affection which is founded on enduring qualities; faithful friendship; the happiness of unselfish work, of doing a little good, and of meeting now and then a touch of heroism, generosity or sympathy so fine that it thrills one to the core. It is a wonderful medley of good and bad, this human life of ours; but we

must not lose heart in it at the beginning, nor faith in the possibilities of good because we have been disappointed or deceived."

"The worst disappointment is in one's self," she said, quickly; and then, as if anxious to avoid an explanation of her words, turned and joined Mrs. Thorpe, who, as it happened, was advancing toward them.

Fenwick stood quite still, looking after her with a frown, which was with him a sign of puzzled thought. What did it mean? These enigmatical utterances, these abrupt movements and varying moods, were not like Carmela. A change had come over her, yet she was plainly not happy. He glanced suspiciously toward Lestrangle. "If I thought it was *his* fault—" he said to himself; and then paused, with a smile in which there was little amusement.

However much it might be Lestrangle's fault, what was there that he, Fenwick, could do? Absolutely nothing. With this reflection he seemed, as it were, to come to himself; and, determining that he would think no more of a matter which did not and could not concern him, he too advanced to meet Mrs. Thorpe; and when she said, "Do you not think, Mr. Fenwick, that it is time we were starting for Coyoacan?" he answered promptly, "Yes, we will go at once."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE ancient and picturesque town of Coyoacan is much older than the existing city of Mexico; for, after the destruction of the Aztec city of Tenochtitlan, Cortez established himself and his government there, and thence directed the laying out of the present capital. On the northern side of the little plaza may still be seen the house, with his arms graven over the doorway, in which he dwelt at this period; and in the churchyard stands a cross, which tradition says was planted by the conqueror on a mound that was a place of worship in primitive times.

Standing here, under the blue Mexican sky, in the dazzling Mexican sunshine, the long gulf of centuries seems but a brief period across which to look at the warlike figure of the great Spaniard, who, single-handed as it were, won an empire for Spain and for Christ. In the history of the world there are few more wonderful stories than that of the Conquest of Mexico; few more heroic and remarkable characters than that of the man who dared to burn his ships behind him, and, with a handful of discontented followers, throw

himself on the resources alone of his own marvellous generalship, diplomacy and tact. That he had faults no one can deny—what soldier of fortune in that or any other age was likely to be without them?—but they were few compared to his great qualities; and of the brilliancy of his genius, the heroic temper of his courage, the indomitable character of his resolution, and the ardor of his faith, there can be no question. Never before or since did conqueror attain such great results with such inadequate means. So, challenging every criticism that can be made upon him, Hernando Cortez stands, in the eye of fancy, by the side of the cross he planted, and points with one mailed hand to the throngs of dark-skinned people, who pass with such reverent and touching faith in and out of the great open door of the church. He, whose banner bore emblazoned upon it the device, "*Amici, sequamur Crucem, et si nos fidem, habemus vere in hoc signo vincemus*," * and whose expedition sailed under the patronage of the Fisherman of Galilee, brought a great net of souls to the Bark of Peter, and well deserves the prayers of the Church, whose faithful son he was, and the admiration and respect of all Catholics.

* Friends, let us follow the Cross; and, if we have faith, by this sign we shall conquer."

His presence still seems to dominate the quiet little town that once knew that presence so well. The steel-clad figures of the men who surrounded him, and who wrote their names with their swords so broadly across the pages of history, fill the imagination, and come and go in the glancing sunlight. Only the most dull and ignorant person could escape the associations of the place. Mrs. Thorpe declared that she felt herself in the sixteenth century; and Fenwick and Lestrangle varied historical reminiscences by a discussion, which narrowly escaped being a wrangle, over the character of the Conquest and of the *conquistadores*. Naturally, their point of view was very different; although, since both were men of culture, they could not disagree as widely as men of narrower knowledge and ideas would have done.

Carmela listened without comment—standing, a slender, graceful figure, by the side of the old legend-encrusted cross, around which they were all grouped. Her eyes seemed full of dreams and heroic visions as she gazed before her. In fact, she saw those long-past days of which they talked, with all their stirring movement, their chivalric pomp and religious ardor, more clearly than the living present. It did not occur to her to think that in her person two widely different lines of ancestry met—the Anglo-Saxon,

with its brutal methods of conquest, its simple plan of extirpating weaker races; and the Spanish, with its high ideal of a religious apostolate. But there could be no doubt with which of the two her sympathy was. She turned and gave Fenwick a sweet and grateful smile when he said that, without comprehending the fervor and sincerity of their faith, and the religious end which they held ever in view, it was impossible to understand the character of the discoverers of the New World; and, although their ideal was tarnished now and then by the acts of individuals, that it was preserved and ever kept in sight by the ruling spirits and by the policy of the government, the survival of the native people and their thorough conversion to Christianity abundantly proved.

Perhaps it was Carmela's smile which did more than anything else to end the discussion here. Lestrangle shrugged his shoulders, and said that when two persons regarded a subject from such widely different points of view there was nothing to be gained by comparing opinions. Mrs. Thorpe remarked that she began to find the sixteenth century rather fatiguing, and would not object to return to the nineteenth; upon which Fenwick suggested that, as an appropriate way thither, they should betake themselves to the

Pedrigal (stony place), which lies immediately south of Coyoacan.

This charming spot is a wilderness of scattered rocks, among which grow luxuriantly feathery trees, flowering shrubs, and trailing vines, interspersed with the ever-present cactus. Among the rocks and lavish greenery footways lead in every direction, forming a perfect maze of diverging paths, which skirt along low stone walls, passing now and then curious little stone houses, with gardens full of tropical verdure, and again winding by the side of clear, pretty streams. In the midst of this enchanting labyrinth is a picturesque little chapel, dedicated to the Child Jesus, and it was from this point that the party happened to divide—not without intention on the part of one of its members.

Nothing could have been farther from Le-strange's intention when they set out on their day's expedition than to make any attempt to speak to Carmela alone in the course of it. But of the impulsive and egotistical character nothing can be predicated with safety except the certainty of change. As the day went on, and he perceived two things very distinctly—first that Carmela exhibited complete indifference toward him, and second that Fenwick appeared to be on terms of the most friendly intimacy with her,—

his jealous vanity urged him to make an effort to assert his own influence, of the power of which he had no doubt. His first attempts, however, were not very successful. When he addressed Carmela she answered him with perfect courtesy ; but the sensitiveness which characterized him toward all that concerned himself told him that the old, quick response of interest and sympathy was absolutely lacking. Now, this interest and this sympathy were like the bread of life to him. It was necessary to his existence—certainly to his comfortable existence—that they should be rendered, and he began to entertain a sense of injury in the fact that they were withheld by Carmela. After all, what had he done? Was it his fault that Fate had separated them? Had she expected him to return to her in the face of circumstances which made it impossible? It was natural that, after asking himself these questions for some time, he should have finally felt impelled to ask them of her.

And so, assisted perhaps by Mrs. Thorpe, he contrived that, on leaving the little chapel of the Niño Jesús, Carmela and himself should turn into one path, while Mrs. Thorpe and Fenwick followed another. That these paths diverged in different directions Carmela did not observe for a moment or two, then she paused and remarked :

"These ways do not come together. It is best that we go back and follow the others."

"The paths will join a little farther on," said Lestrangle, boldly. "We shall meet my aunt and Fenwick in a few minutes. Meanwhile I hope you are not afraid to trust yourself with me?"

"Of what should I be afraid?" she asked, quietly, turning her clear, dark eyes upon him. "But it is best that we should join Mrs. Thorpe," she repeated.

"You shall do so in a moment," he said; "but will you not give *me* a little of the time and attention which I have seen you giving so freely to—others all day? What have I done," he cried, with a sudden impulse, "that you should think me unworthy of your notice? If I was so unhappy as to cause you suffering a year ago, did I not also suffer myself?"

She started and stood for a moment, looking at him with a surprise which words can but faintly express. Was it possible that he could thus rush into a subject of which she could hardly bring herself to think, much less to speak, without a painful effort? Suffer! Had he, indeed, suffered at all—was he capable of suffering at all—since he could talk of it in this manner, and to *her*? The recoil of disgust with which a sensitive soul feels a rude touch upon its emo-

tions was her controlling sentiment as, after a pause which seemed long to both, she said, coldly :

“Is there any necessity that we should speak of a subject which belongs entirely to the past? I know of no reason for doing so, and I have certainly no desire to recall what is now only matter for regret.”

“Is it no more than *that* to you?” he asked, incredulous, yet stung. “Carmela, it cannot be possible! When I look at you I feel as if it were only yesterday we parted, only yesterday that—”

She interrupted him by a gesture of noble indignation. For one moment he saw a flash of fire in the eyes, usually so full of softness. “Do not speak of those things!” she said, in a voice that trembled slightly, despite its proud command. “Do you know me so little, or do you think so poorly of me, as to fancy that I will tolerate even an allusion from you to a past which it fills me with deep humiliation to remember? I will listen to nothing more! Let us rejoin the others at once.”

“No, I beg of you! Give me a moment to explain myself!” he said, startled by her anger, as the anger of a usually gentle person has always power to startle. “You cannot do me

such injustice as to think that I meant to pain or offend you. I would cut out my tongue sooner. But you must let me say that the past which fills *you* with humiliation, fills *me* with the bitterest regret. There is no reason for your feeling, but there is every reason for mine. I know that I must have seemed to you to play a very poor—let us say, a very contemptible part. But if you will let me explain my conduct you may not blame me so much.”

“There is no need for you to explain anything,” she replied, with a dignity which impressed him even more than her momentary flash of anger had done. “Since you insist upon speaking of a matter which it would be better to leave untouched, as we leave the dead quietly in their graves, I must tell you that when I closed the door upon that past, I closed it also upon every inclination to blame you. I acknowledged to myself that the fault for which I suffered was more mine than yours. *You* acted as I suppose you were accustomed to act—simply on impulse and inclination, without considering consequences or principles. I might have known this, for you were frank enough. Of your own inconstancy, your disregard of duty, and disbelief in religion, you spoke freely. I had, therefore, no right to blame you when the end came.

But I—I, who had been trained to the consideration of all those things—I, too, forgot them ; I, too, acted as if the impulses of passion were all that was to guide our lives ; and I suffered as I deserved to suffer—”

He endeavored to speak here, but she silenced him by a gesture and went on ; “ When I came to myself I recognized this—I saw that a feeling with no better foundation than ours could only end as ours had done ; and in the sad humiliation with which I condemned myself there was no room for condemnation of you. You had acted according to your nature, your beliefs and your training, and so were hardly to blame. I felt that then, as I feel it now.”

A silence followed these incisive words, which Lestrangle found difficult to break. Perhaps in all his life before he had never been so much astonished. Was this indeed *Carmela* who had spoken—the girl whom he had known impressionable as a sensitive plant, swayed by feeling as a reed by the wind, and wholly subject to his influence, save when some deep rock of principle was touched ? He felt as if there were nothing in common between that girl and the woman who now so calmly judged the passionate past, condemned herself, and refused to condemn him for reasons less flattering to his vanity than any blame

could have been. So totally unexpected was such a manner of regarding the past—so little had he ever dreamed of being judged and put aside with a contempt too lofty to express itself,—that he was like a man from beneath whose feet, the ground has been suddenly cut away, and who looks around in bewilderment for some other standing-place. Involuntarily he took refuge on the first that offered itself, and adopted the tone of reproach which the young girl had disdained to employ.

“You are unjust to me,” he said. “You have condemned me without making an effort to understand how painfully I was placed. Your mother made the consent of my parents an unalterable condition to *her* consent. Could I return without it, to meet both her refusal and yours? What should I have gained by that?”

“Nothing certainly,” she answered. “But is it not true that you knew always that your parents would be influenced by the wishes of Mrs. Thorpe, and that she was not likely to consent to your marriage with a Mexican girl? Your sister, at least, knew this, and warned my mother of it at the beginning.”

Between his teeth he said something not very flattering to the absent Miriam before he remarked: “I thought that by personal persuasion

I might be able to overcome the opposition both of my parents and of Mrs. Thorpe. But the last proved impossible at least—at that time; and if I had gained the first without it, how could I have gone back with nothing to offer you but a prospect of poverty and struggle?”

“It would have been impossible—for you,” she said, with something like compassion in her voice. “One must be very certain that the thing for which one sacrifices wealth and ease is a thing which one not only values more than these, but which is in itself a higher good. If one is *not* certain of this, then the day of regret—the day when one will feel that one has paid too dearly for its possession—is as sure to come as the sun to rise in the heaven. Believe me, if you had returned I should have spared you that. I always knew—knew it as one knows some things despite one’s self—that what you felt for me was not likely to endure in the face of anything unpleasant. I told you when we parted that I could better bear the pain of losing you than to think that you might regret losing a fortune for me. And you know I did not say that without meaning it. You did not feel anything for me which would have repaid you for the loss of fortune, and so it was well you did not return. I have known that from the first.”

Her voice dropped with the cadence of one who ends a subject finally. She involuntarily spread out her slender hands with one of the graceful Mexican gestures he had once known well. It signified, as he was aware, that there was nothing more to be said ; and he felt as if he himself were dismissed, dropped like an exhausted subject, from those delicate finger-tips. He stood gazing at her with something like an expression of despair on his handsome face. What could he say ? It was all true—that quiet, keen, terribly gentle indictment. What he had felt for her had *not* been of a nature to lead to any sacrifice, or to endure in the face of unpleasant consequences or even of pleasant distractions. He had given her up with a facile ease which amazed him in the retrospect ; and confronted by the truth, as it regarded him from her calm, beautiful eyes, the excuses with which he had satisfied himself seemed as paltry and ignoble as his conduct. At length he ventured to speak :

“ What can I answer ? You are merciless. You make no allowances for me—none. I acknowledge that I was weak and cowardly, that I feared poverty, feared disagreeables, feared everything except what I now see was most to be feared—the loss of your faith and respect. Oh yes, I know that you have disdained to

reproach me, but if you still loved me you would !”

“Perhaps so,” she assented, with the same gentleness, which seemed to remove her farther from him. “But all that is over. It has been long now since I have seen clearly that we were never intended for each other, and that it was well we learned it so soon.”

A vague memory came to Lestrangle of having thought, felt or said something like this himself. Had he not informed himself or Miriam that it was well matters had ended as they did, since Carmela was not in any respect suited to him? The assurance of the same fact from her lips now—now when she had never before seemed so desirable, because so far beyond his reach—seemed to him fraught with the keenness of mockery and punishment in one. All power of reply or of remonstrance was taken from him; and, without exchanging another word, they turned and went back along the path to rejoin the others.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AS the party—all of whom had a depressing consciousness that the day had not been a success—journeyed back to the city, Mr. Lestrangle decided that he would tell Mrs. Thorpe that there was no reason for his staying longer in Mexico, and take his departure immediately for the States. But by the time they had all dined together at the Café Anglais, and he had afterward smoked a meditative cigar in the quiet, beautiful alleys of the Alameda, one of the facile changes to which he was liable came over him. He reminded himself that he had not come to Mexico with the intention of seeking to renew his broken relations with Carmela, and that therefore the sentiments which she had avowed with such uncomfortable frankness had not altered his position in the least. He had come primarily to satisfy himself regarding Mrs. Thorpe's intentions, and these intentions were still unknown to him. To go away, therefore, in ignorance would be an act of folly of which in his cooler moments he could not be guilty.

Moreover, what, after all, had passed between

himself and Carmela? Simply an explanation, in which she had certainly mortified his vanity, but in the course of which he had not committed himself to any expression of desire for the renewal of their engagement. He had not been rejected, because he had offered nothing, save apologies. Should the time come when he would offer more, the result (so he began to assure himself) might be different. Already his vanity softened the uncomfortable memory of Carmela's words and looks and tones. Face to face with her, he had not been able to blind himself to their meaning, and he had felt that meaning in every fibre. But now he told himself that they had been dictated by the natural indignation of a woman who felt that she had been trifled with; and that it was impossible for one so young, so full of passionate feeling, and so gentle even in anger, to resist the influence of a man whom but a little time before she had certainly loved, should he care to exert that influence. But, however this might be, at least one thing was clear: he could not go away leaving Mrs. Thorpe's caprices to assert themselves in any manner they chose, and Fenwick to take *his* place with Carmela. A jealous anger seized him when he thought of Fenwick. He fancied how pleased that gentleman would be to see him depart, and he decided

that he had been very foolish even to think of affording him the gratification.

Fenwick, meanwhile, was hearing from Mrs. Thorpe a very frank statement of the case. She saw that he was puzzled, and she decided that some explanation was due to him; so, after Carmela had retired to her room, excusing herself on the plea of fatigue, and while Lestrangle was smoking his cigar in the Alameda, these two, seated together in the soft night of the balcony of the hotel, became thoroughly confidential. She told him the whole story, leaving out nothing of her own part therein; and he listened quietly, asking himself how much hope there might be for him in it. Of one thing he felt sure: Lestrangle's return had brought no happiness to Carmela in the present, whatever it might do in the future; and he said as much to Mrs. Thorpe. She agreed with him, and then added:

"But do not be too certain in the conclusions you draw from that. Women are strange creatures. She may care for him all the time and hardly be aware of it herself. I am inclined to believe that she does, else she would not have shrunk so much from seeing him."

Fenwick smiled. "Women *are* strange creatures," he said, "else surely it would not occur to you to draw such a conclusion from such a fact."

It seems to me in my masculine ignorance, to argue quite otherwise. But I think at least we may be certain that Mr. Lestrangle will not be allowed to simply step into the place he resigned : he must win it, if he is ever again to possess it. How much advantage the past may or may not give him in this, I cannot pretend to determine, but on one point I am able to assure you very positively : he will not have the lists altogether to himself on this occasion. Carmela Lestrangle is the one woman I have ever known who seems to me worth any effort to win, and I shall certainly make every effort to win her. Should I succeed, I can promise that she will not slip away from me because I have not appreciation enough of her value to hold fast what I have won."

"I am sure of that," said Mrs. Thorpe. She sighed a little. After all, was it so much Arthur's fault that he had been tried beyond his strength, and that this prize had slipped away from his lax grasp? There could be no doubt what was best for Carmela ; yet her pity suddenly rose for the man whom her caprice had deprived of so great a good.

"I find that for our wrong acts there is generally a very swift retribution, even on earth," she observed, after a moment. "And, however much

we may desire to atone, the possibility of thorough atonement is seldom in our power. When I came to Mexico I thought I had only to put out my hand to undo what I had done. But I soon found how much I was mistaken. I soon found that I was powerless to do anything; and, although disappointed, I could only admire Carmela's whole attitude in the matter. When I first sought her acquaintance she was placed in a position which to many people would, under the circumstances, have been very difficult. But I am unable to give you any idea of the dignity, the simplicity and the high-mindedness with which she acted. She knew that I was the moving cause of Arthur's conduct; but she ignored the fact completely, or only showed her recollection of it by declining to discuss anything regarding him with me. Until this morning I was in complete ignorance of her feelings toward him. I have told you the substance of what she said then. How much hope there may be in it for him or for you, I confess that I cannot tell."

"It is difficult to tell," answered Fenwick. He looked absently at the scene before him. The sweeping curve of the gallery that, with its incandescent electric lights, encircles the front of the old monastic building; the masses of drooping foliage in the garden; the figures moving

here and there, giving an effect of life and movement without noise ; and the dark blue sky, thick-sown with shining stars, looking down,—all made a picture which would dwell long in his memory. Yet, as he gazed, he was hardly conscious of seeing it, so clearly did he see instead the sunlight falling in the old Carmelite garden, and Carmela's face as she said, "Nothing that can fill our hearts or make them constant even for the shortest time ; nothing which gives lasting happiness or repays one for the pain of which life is so full." The sweet, pathetic tones seemed sounding in his ears, and he forgot Lestrangle to ask himself, with a pang at his heart, if it would ever be granted to *him* to teach her that even human love might mean something beside pain.

The next day it was generally, though tacitly, understood that there was to be no sight-seeing. For the first time since their arrival at Guadalupe, Fenwick proposed nothing for the amusement of the two ladies ; and, after a brief meeting in the morning, the day passed without their seeing him at all. It was not a very agreeable day to any one. Carmela remained for the most part in her own room, and had so far the advantage of Mrs. Thorpe, who, having summoned Lestrangle, had no alternative but to make the

best of his society. He was tired, bored, ill at ease, and not a very interesting companion. He wished to sound his aunt with regard to her intentions, but had not courage sufficient to do so; and he felt distinctly aggrieved that Carmela should avoid him. Had she wished to bring him back to his former allegiance, no conduct that she could have adopted would have been more likely to do so. He began to long to reinstate himself in her good opinion and to win again his old power—the power it had been so great a pleasure to exercise,—but how was he to do so if she gave him no opportunity?

This was the question he was putting to himself while lounging in Mrs. Thorpe's sitting-room, and irritating that lady by his restlessness and ill-concealed weariness.

"I really think, Arthur," she said, with asperity, "that if it bores you so much to be here, it will be best for you to go away. I have not the least desire to make a martyr of you."

"My dear aunt," replied Lestrangle, "I have never credited you with such a desire. Nor do I feel myself in the least a martyr. I assure you that I like very well to be here, otherwise I should certainly go away. Have you ever known me fail to gratify my own wishes when it was possible to do so?"

"Never," answered Mrs. Thorpe, emphatically. "In that respect at least, I can congratulate you upon perfect consistency. But nothing is easier than to tell when you are bored, and you are badly bored at present—do not deny it."

"Why should I deny what you say is evident? I was not aware of it myself, but we are not always the best judges of ourselves. I confess, however, that I am restless. Uncertainty is, you know, always trying to the nerves."

"And what uncertainty are you suffering?" asked the lady. "You informed me immediately on your arrival that you had no wish to renew your engagement with Carmela, and I do not think she leaves you in any doubt with regard to the fact that she is not anxious to do so either."

"I told you that—yes," he answered; "but I also told you that I would be governed in my conduct by what I discovered of Carmela's feelings. Consequently I am in uncertainty, for Carmela gives me no opportunity to learn anything about her."

"Had you no opportunity yesterday in the Pedrigal?" Mrs. Thorpe asked, with a quickness which confused him. "I certainly thought some explanation would be the result of your having so conveniently followed the wrong path."

He was vexed to feel himself color. There was

no one to whom he would not have confided the result of that conversation in the Pedrigal rather than to this woman, who seemed always ready to taunt him with the weakness of which her own conduct had been the moving cause.

"We spoke a little of the past," he remarked: "but not at all of the present. She was good enough to say that she does not blame me for—anything. But that does not make it less necessary that I should blame myself. I acted like—"

"The egotist that you always were," said Mrs. Thorpe, candidly but not unkindly, as he paused. "Let us be frank, Arthur. You acted like an egotist, and I like a tyrant. Well, I at least am punished; for, now that I know Carmela Le-strange, I would give much to bring her into my life by means of some enduring tie. But this I do not think is to be."

"You mean," he said hastily, too much struck by her words to consider for the moment his pride, "that you do not think she will ever now consent to marry me?"

Mrs. Thorpe did not remind him of the striking inconsistency between the eagerness of the question and the attitude he had up to this time assumed. She only looked at him with an expression which he thought the kindest he had ever seen on her face, as she answered: "I have

no reason to make such a prophecy. Carmela is not altogether like other girls—not easily fathomed or understood,—and it is difficult to say what she will or will not do. Only this I am sure of: she will not pardon easily one who has acted as you have done; and if you are to regain what you have lost, it can only be by winning anew her confidence and respect.”

“I should prefer to win her heart,” he said—
“if indeed it has ever been lost to me.”

His aunt shook her head. “You make a great mistake,” she replied, “in thinking that it is possible to win her heart unless you can first win again her confidence and respect. There may be women who love without considering whether the men they love are worthy or not, but Carmela is not one of them—no woman of the highest order is. Respect, you know, is a necessary part of love. You have forfeited hers, and you must regain it before you can hope to win her love.”

“But how am I to do this?” he asked, with a humility which sat strangely upon him, and which was the result of the recollection of Carmela’s words of yesterday coming to strengthen those of Mrs. Thorpe to-day. “It is not an easy task.”

“No,” said his monitor, “it is not easy; but if you wish to succeed, it is necessary. For myself,

I need not tell you how much I should rejoice in your success; for it would take from me a weight of self-reproach which otherwise can never be removed, and it would bring into close relations with me one to whom I owe a great debt of gratitude."

"Of gratitude?" he repeated interrogatively, lifting his eyebrows in surprise.

"Of gratitude," Mrs. Thorpe answered; "since it is not likely that but for Carmela I should ever have been what I am to-day—a Catholic, in belief at least."

"A Catholic—you!" ejaculated Lestrangle. He stared as if he thought that she had suddenly lost her senses. She could hardly have astonished him more. "But it is impossible!" he cried, after a moment. "How often have we agreed —"

"Yes," she interposed, "I know that we have agreed to a great many foolish things—you and I. But, then, you see, as I have discovered, we were very ignorant, for all that we fancied ourselves so wise."

"And you have come to Mexico to discover that?" he exclaimed, with a contemptuous accent of incredulity.

"Yes," she said again. "It was a blow to my arrogant Anglo-Saxon and modern pride; was it

not? I fancied that I was coming to a country of backward progress and mediæval traditions, where all the worst superstitions and corruptions of the 'Roman Church' flourished in an atmosphere of ignorance. Well, I have learned lessons here which I hope never to forget,—lessons of touching faith, of noble, unstinted charity; of patience under persecution; of virtue and wisdom so admirable that I said to myself that the religion which produced such fruits was worthy of closest study. And when I came to inquire into its doctrines and practices, I found all reasonable, harmonious and perfect. There were no gaps to be filled by violent assumptions, as in other systems I had known; and instead of an atmosphere of ignorance, I found myself admitted for the first time in my life into clear, intellectual light. This light I know now that I could have found anywhere—for it is the light of undivided truth which the Catholic Church everywhere possesses; but, as a matter of fact, I never found it until I came to Mexico. I tell you these things, Arthur, in order that you may understand that I act only from thorough conviction."

"Well," observed Lestrangle, throwing himself back in his chair, "I can only say that I am more than astonished—I am stupefied! Had I

been asked who was the last person I could imagine likely to yield to the attractions of the Church of Rome, I should have said yourself."

"I should have said myself also," she answered. "But God is aware that I have always been honest with Him: that I have never accepted any sham, or stultified my reason because others chose to do so; and therefore, perhaps, He gave me an opportunity—by a way I could never have foreseen—to find the truth which I have always instinctively desired. And this brings me back to Carmela. If she had not received and treated with the utmost kindness one whom she well knew to be the cause of great suffering to herself, I should not be where I am to-day."

"And how do you propose to reward her?" he asked, with a sudden change of expression.

Mrs. Thorpe looked surprised. "How is it possible for me to reward her?" she asked. "There can be no reward for such a service. But there may be gratitude, appreciation, affection; and these things naturally lead to certain results. Which reminds me, Arthur, of something I wish to say to you—"

"It is coming now!" thought Arthur, grimly.

"As you know," she went on, "I am a very wealthy woman, and I have always intended to make you the heir of at least part of my fortune.

I see now that it would have been better for you if I had never allowed this intention to be known; for the knowledge that you would some day be a rich man has had anything but a good effect upon your character. In fact, you have disappointed me so much—I tell you this frankly—that there have been times lately when I have said to myself that it was still within my power to change my intention. But it did not seem to me that this would be just. Having allowed you to grow up in a certain expectation, I am in honor bound to fulfil it. So now, for the first time, I promise you explicitly that the half of what I possess shall be yours. The other half—

She paused a moment, and Lestrangle listened for her next words with a mixture of suspense and relief. Of late there had been times when he had feared that she would play him one of the cruel tricks of testators, and disappoint all his expectations at last. But now he breathed freely. She had pledged herself, and he knew her too well to fear that she would break her promise. The half of her fortune was less than he had hoped for in his sanguine moments, but more than he had expected in his depressed ones. No one knew better than himself that it represented comfort and ease for life, since Mrs. Thorpe was indeed a very rich woman. But what did she

intend to do with the other half? He waited eagerly to hear.

"I have not yet fully decided," she went on after a moment, "what I will do with the remainder—whether I will leave it to Carmela absolutely, or give it to her in trust for some of the purposes of good in which she has interested me, and which are so near her heart. Probably it will be hers unconditionally; for I am sure that whatever is put in her hands will be used for good. But this I shall take a little time to consider; and meanwhile remember that she knows nothing of such an intention on my part."

"I certainly have no reason for enlightening her," said Lestrangle. Then he added, with the grace which distinguished him when he chose to employ it: "Believe that I am grateful for your kind intentions toward myself; and perhaps most grateful that you leave me no longer in doubt of them. It may be, as you say, a misfortune that I have always looked forward to this inheritance, and that my tastes and habits have been formed accordingly. But I am afraid you would hardly have found me more satisfactory under any circumstances."

The last words touched her, and she suddenly held out her hand to him. "My dear boy," she said, in a tone which he had not heard from her

lips in a long time, "if I have been impatient, harsh and arbitrary—and all of this I know that I *have* been,—try to forgive me; while I, on my part, will be more tolerant of the things in you which do not altogether please me. So we shall do better in the future than in the past, I hope."

CHAPTER XXVII.

"IF you are to regain the place you have lost, it can only be by winning anew the confidence and respect you have forfeited."

These emphatic words of Mrs. Thorpe rang in Lestrangle's ears with an uncomfortable persistence after he had left her. Their conversation had given him much to think of, but this thought seemed to dominate all the rest—even the astounding declaration of her Catholicity, and the relief, mingled with disappointment, of her promise that he should certainly inherit half of her fortune. Was it strange that, after hearing of the destination of the other half, Carmela began to seem a much more desirable object in his eyes? There are few lovers so disinterested that such an announcement would not quicken their ardor; and to the exceedingly small class who would have been uninfluenced by it Lestrangle had no pretensions to belong. He frankly told himself that it was now absolutely necessary that he should make his peace with Carmela. But how was he to accomplish this desirable end, the difficulty of which he could not conceal from

himself? Like a mocking echo he recalled Mrs. Thorpe's words: "You must win anew her confidence and respect."

As he had said, it was not an easy task; but if it were essential, it must be done. Only—how? He had no fancy for the long, slow process of building up again a forfeited trust; he desired to attain his end by some brilliant stroke—something which would accomplish the desired result with dramatic effect and dramatic rapidity. No flash of inspiration came, however, to tell him how this should be done; and when he met Carmela there was nothing in her gentle courtesy to help him to a solution of his difficulty.

The next day was Sunday; and, after hearing Mass in the charming old Church of Santa Brigida—an ancient convent foundation, rescued by private munificence from the secularizing hands of the government, served by Jesuit Fathers, and a very favorite church with the higher class of Mexicans,—Mrs. Thorpe and Carmela, attended by Lestrangle, went to the Alameda, where all the fashionable world betakes itself on Sunday morning.

It is a brilliant and beautiful scene which the lovely pleasure-ground presents on these occasions. The wide, shade-arched avenues, usually so quiet, are filled for two or three hours with a

throng abounding in all manner of picturesque contrasts of nationality, class and costume. On rows of chairs, carefully placed in the shadow of the tall trees, with strips of carpet under their dainty feet, sit ladies whose toilets bear the highest stamp of Parisian elegance, and men full of distinction of appearance; while between these lines of spectators, who have come both to see and to be seen, passes the shifting crowd of promenaders, chiefly composed of figures as fashionably elegant as those who watch them; with a large sprinkling of foreigners, and now and then a few of the lower orders in their picturesque dress. In high pavilions among the green foliage two bands are playing alternately; the sun shines with dazzling brightness; the atmosphere is fragrant with the odors of countless flowers; the very air seems to pulsate with pleasure and the sense of gay life.

Lestranger, to whom such scenes were always enchanting, with their countless suggestions of fashion and gayety, felt his spirits rise as soon as he entered the beautiful pleasance, and found himself, with his companions, part of the quietly-moving, well-dressed throng. It was altogether just such an atmosphere as suited him; and his sense of enjoyment was increased by the consciousness of being himself irreproachable in all

points of appearance, and of attending two ladies who were equally so.

Mrs. Thorpe was the ideal of an elderly, aristocratic chaperon, while it seemed to him that among all the fair faces present he saw none to compare with Carmela's. Her toilet of black lace, with its graceful masses of drapery, needed perhaps the charming lace mantilla to complete its artistic effect ; but if the artist in him desired this, the man of the world was more than satisfied with the picturesque black hat, covered with a mass of soft, curling plumes, which Mrs. Thorpe had purchased in one of the French shops that seem bodily transported from the Rue de la Paix to the Calle San Francisco, and insisted on Carmela's accepting. There are men whom nothing charms so much as the union of fashion with beauty, and Lestrangle belonged entirely to this class. He noted every detail of Carmela's toilet, even to the long, perfectly fitting gloves of tan *suede* on her slender hands ; and said to himself that she bore triumphantly the difficult test of dress, and that a man might be proud to walk by her side anywhere. With this thought came also the conviction that it would be his happy fate so to walk through many scenes which his soul loved ; for nothing was more impossible to him than to remain long in any depressed or humble

frame of mind. The thing he desired had, so far, always been, with trifling exceptions, the thing which had come to him ; and he could not believe that Carmela would prove an exception to the rule.

They walked for some time along the stately avenues, around the sweeping *glorietas* or circles, in the midst of which fountains played ; great masses of Nile lilies bloomed in the centre of limpid pools of water, or statues stood on pedestals of daisy-starred turf. Every radiating vista formed an enchanting picture ; the air was filled with strains of music and the sound of musical speech. Mrs. Thorpe declared that she had never seen a place that fascinated her so much.

"I do not think there is a promenade in Europe to compare with it in picturesque charm," she said. "Mr. Fenwick and I were agreeing in that opinion last Sunday. By the bye, where *is* Mr. Fenwick, I wonder ? He has absolutely deserted us. I thought we should certainly meet him here."

Some one else had the same thought, although she did not express it. Ever since they entered the Alameda Carmela had, half unconsciously, been expecting Fenwick to appear ; and, had she been thinking of herself or her own sensations, she would have been surprised by the disap-

pointment which his non-appearance caused. Involuntarily she contrasted to-day with last Sunday, when he had been their attendant ; and knew that she had enjoyed every sight and sound then with a pleasure, a sense of sympathetic companionship, which was altogether lacking now. Had some spirit of wisdom counselled Fenwick to put his value to the test in this way, or was he only depressed by the presence of Lestrangle ? However that might be, it is certain that he did not seek them ; and it was apparently only by accident that they met him at last—walking with an elderly gentleman, whom, pausing, he begged to introduce as an old friend just arrived from the States. The sound of the gentleman's name made Mrs. Thorpe beam with the cordiality which people generally display on making a desirable acquaintance ; and after a moment or two they all moved on together—Fenwick's friend, whom he had presented as Governor Rayburn, walking by the side of Mrs. Thorpe, while Fenwick himself fell back and joined Carmela and Lestrangle, by no means to the gratification of the latter.

This sufficiently obvious fact did not, however, trouble the newcomer. His eyes, with something like a tender smile in their depths, rested on the girl, as if the mere sight of her was a pleasure to

him. He, too, noted her toilet, and thought how well its perfection set off her delicate beauty; but he also said to himself that he preferred the nun-like maiden, with poetic eyes, whom he saw in the early morning of every day going to Mass, with the black drapery of her country over her graceful head.

"You look as if you belonged to the *grand monde*," he said to her, smiling. "Yet I think I prefer the Mexican señorita."

"The Mexican señorita is not lost," Carmela answered, smiling also. "She will reappear in good time. But, you know, our customs are very fixed. For a fashionable promenade like this one wears a fashionable toilet; but for many other occasions—especially, as a rule, for going to church—we dress very plainly and cover our heads with the black mantilla. I have heard," she added, a little maliciously, "that in your country ladies dress to go to Church as if they were going to a theatre."

"I cannot deny that it is true," he said. "The kind of dress-parade that takes place in our churches will certainly strike me as very strange when I return from Mexico, where, without a thought of personal display, shrouded like nuns, the women go to church simply to pray."

"Even with us," observed Lestrangle, "I think

that the people who wear their fine feathers to church are generally those who have nowhere else to display them."

"Unfortunately, there is not even that excuse—if it be an excuse—for many of them," returned Fenwick. "The tendency of human nature to display its fine feathers is very natural," he added. "I do not quarrel with that, but only with the bad taste evinced in the places too often chosen for the display. Now, this is perfect" (with a glance around). "The gay world never found a more charming setting for its brilliance."

"I do not suppose," said Lestrangle, superciliously, "that such scenes have very much attraction for you. One must be familiar with the gay world in order to enjoy it."

Fenwick looked at him for a moment, as if wondering a little at such gratuitous impertinence. Then he answered, quietly: "My familiarity with the gay world has been sufficient to enable me to appreciate it, I believe, with tolerable justice. I am not one of those who worship it for the sake of its prosperity, or who foolishly denounce it as hollow and shallow. Like every other world—that is, like every other order of society,—it possesses much that is good, as well as much that is bad. There is not at bottom

a great deal of difference in human nature, whether covered by satin or fustian. Wealth, in itself, forms no distinction, except to the vulgar-minded; but fine manners, liberal education, perfect culture—these things *do* form a distinction; and for the sake of these, which it mostly possesses, I take off my hat to your gay world. There are many worse places in life to sojourn than within its charmed borders; still, I should not care to abide there altogether.”

“And I care to abide in no other place,” said Lestrangle, brusquely. “It is the only world in which life is worth living. Were I forced to abandon it—that is, were I deprived of the wealth that is necessary to hold one’s place in it,—I should wish to go away and bury myself in some wild part of the world, where no echo of it could ever come to me.”

He had forgotten Carmela as he spoke; but she, listening to him, said to herself that it was not strange that love for *her* had yielded before such passionate love for the things which it had seemed necessary for him to renounce in order to win her.

“Oh, there is no doubt of your always having a place in it!” replied Fenwick, lightly. “You are the type of man made for it; and, to do the

beau monde justice, it always knows its own. Now I—”

“You feel yourself too superior, perhaps?” said Arthur, who seemed still determined to be rude.

“On the contrary,” answered Fenwick, with a laugh, “I feel myself too dull. I have a habit of looking at life too seriously to suit the gay atmosphere of which we speak. I arrogate no virtue to myself on that account. It only proves a certain want of adaptability in my nature. My ideal of a man is one whose sympathy is broad enough to embrace all orders of society, to whom ‘nothing that is human is strange.’ But, nevertheless, we must be content to know ourselves fall far below our ideals,” he added, with a smile addressed specially to Carmela.

She wished to tell him how much she liked his kind and gentle philosophy, and how nearly he seemed to her to approach his own ideal; but words seemed lacking to her. It was only after a moment that she said, a little timidly: “It seems to me very narrow to imagine that all good is either in high or low. I have myself seen so much in both—so much charity and generosity in those to whom God has given wealth, so much patience, resignation and fortitude in the poor. But for myself, I think I should not care

to be too prosperous. I should fear to grow to love the things of the world too well."

"There speaks your strain of Spanish asceticism," remarked Lestrangle. "You know I always told you that it was in your nature. But you belong to another race also, Carmelita,—a race which holds and values and makes the most of the things of this world—which, after all, is the only world we know anything about," he added, shrugging his shoulders.

There was much in this speech which offended both his hearers. First, the familiar use of the affectionate diminutive of Carmela's name ; and secondly, the words with which he concluded.

"If we know nothing of any other world, it is surely our own fault," she answered, coldly. "And for myself, if I have alien blood in my veins, I am at least wholly Mexican in my heart."

She looked at him with a challenge in her dark eyes, which made him think that he had never seen her so beautiful or so spirited before. It was with reproach not altogether simulated that he said, quickly: "And so you deny your father's race and people! Do you think that is just or well?"

"I deny nothing," she replied. "But I cannot admire nor wish to identify myself with a race

that has abandoned the faith of God, and worships with a servile adulation the things of this world—its wealth, its prosperity, its power. I would rather be the poorest of my people than the greatest of those who chiefly represented yours among us, so sordid have they been, so steeped in materialism, so—” She paused abruptly, and glanced from one to the other of her companions with a charming apology. “Pardon me,” she said. “I forget myself. I should not speak in this manner to you. And, indeed, it has given me great pleasure to learn how delightful and admirable some Americans can be.”

“We must not fail to appropriate such a compliment to ourselves, Lestrangle,” said Fenwick, lifting his hat. “I feel a serene consciousness that I am one of the delightful and admirable Americans alluded to.”

“Can you doubt it?” asked Carmela, turning to him with a smile.

Lestrangle glanced at her suspiciously. Her frankness seemed reassuring, yet he knew well that Carmela could not be judged by rules that held good with other girls. He felt disgusted and irritated in a comprehensive manner with everything, including himself. He dared not ask, even in Fenwick’s jesting fashion, if Carmela included him in the class of people so flatteringly

described ; for to do so would be to approach too near to subjects which were no matter for jest. If they were alone now— He felt at this moment that it would afford him unfeigned satisfaction to call Fenwick into the green obscurity of one of the remoter alleys, and there run him through the body, like a mediæval cavalier or a modern French journalist. But, such heroic measures being impossible, he felt it at least a relief when Mrs. Thorpe turned around and proposed that they should take possession of some vacant seats in a shady nook.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE next day Fenwick said that it was necessary to show his newly arrived friend the Castle of Chapultepec ; and asked if his other friends, who had of course already visited it, did not care to see it again, especially since the excursion was to be made in time for the sunset view. They all agreed willingly ; for, as Mrs. Thorpe remarked, Chapultepec is something which it is hardly possible to see too often ; and moreover it was essential to do something to occupy their time. So in the golden afternoon they drove out, along the magnificent Pasco—one of the most beautiful drives in the world—which extends from the city to the gates of the park of Chapultepec, and soon found themselves on the great terraces, or *loggias*, of the castle.

From this historic spot—the fortress of the founders of Tenochtitlan, the burial-place of Aztec Kings, the residence of the Viceroys of Spain, and the palace of Maximilian and Carlotta during their brief and tragically-ended reign,—one looks out over one of the great views of the world ; one that for absolute loveliness can scarce

be matched between the Orient and the farthest West. Directly below the craggy height on which the castle stands lies the park with its shadowy alleys, formed of cypresses that were old when the Spaniard first set foot on the New World ; and stretching beyond on every side is the wonderful valley, that burst like a vision of Paradise upon the enraptured gaze of Cortez when he climbed the Eastern mountains and first looked upon it. Leagues of emerald land spread far as the gaze can reach, a very garden of fertility, dotted with remnants of forests, and scores of towns, clustered each around its picturesque church tower and embowered in leafage ; broad, white avenues, lined with stately trees, follow the course of the ancient causeways ; and aqueducts, picturesque as those of the Campagna, stretch their gray stone arches across the green land towards the city, that lies within its encircling walls like a dream of beauty. No blur of smoke rises towards the sapphire sky to mar one jewel-like tint on its mass of gleaming domes, one line of its noble, richly ornate towers. So might Byzantium have looked in the days of her splendor, before the Crescent cast down the Cross. Near by shine the waters of the great lakes : afar, bounding the wonderful picture, rise the noble mountain masses, aerial azure draping their

mighty forms ; while, dominating all else, the two great volcanoes lift towards heaven their radiant summits, crowned with eternal snow.

"It is impossible to imagine anything more beautiful," said Mrs. Thorpe, as they stood on one of the marble-paved terraces, looking east, where the reflected splendors of sunset were already gathering about the luminous mountain tops and over the shining city. "Unless it be from the battlements of Paradise, I never expect to see such another view."

"It would be hard to match it elsewhere," said Fenwick, smiling. "And yet I think that the view from Guadalupe yonder"—and he pointed to the sacred hill in the north—"is almost as fine."

"There is a wide difference sometimes between 'almost' and 'altogether,'" observed Mrs. Thorpe. "The view from Guadalupe is fine, but I know of nothing to compare with this. Every detail here is so perfect."

"And the fact that one looks at it from a palace of almost fairy-like beauty, in situation and arrangement, adds not a little to the charm," remarked Lestrangle.

"For the first time I am inclined to envy the President of Mexico," said Governor Rayburn, looking around with an air of approval. "A man

might be willing to run a little risk to have such a residence as this at his disposal."

"There is no longer any risk involved in the position," remarked Fenwick. "Mexico has grown tired of revolutions, and has become a model of peaceable behavior."

"So has Popocatepetl yonder," said Mrs. Thorpe, significantly; "but who knows when the smouldering fires may break out again? Mexico, too, has a heart of fire under her quietness, and a large class of her people feel themselves the objects of unjust oppression."

"It is a class, however, that are very slow to resort to violence," answered Fenwick. "The priests would have only to hold up their fingers to plunge the land in war and bloodshed again. But we may be sure that they will not do so."

"Well, *I* should do so sooner than submit to so many outrages!" said Mrs. Thorpe, in whom the militant spirit was very strong.

Fenwick laughed. "Persecution is an old, old story to the Church," he went on. "She has suffered it so often that she knows well what the end will be. 'Keep thy purple, O Cæsar: to-morrow we will bury thee in it, and chant over thee the *Alleluia* and the *De Profundis*, which never change.' That, too, is an old story. But does it strike any one that we are only looking

at the reflection of the sunset, which must itself be very fine? Suppose we go to the other side for the western view?"

Mrs. Thorpe and Governor Rayburn assenting, the three moved away; and it was not Carmela's fault that she did not accompany them. She was at a little distance, leaning against the balustrade, and so absorbed in the marvellous picture lying below and afar that she neither heard the conversation nor observed the departure of the trio. Since she lingered Lestrangle remained also, and not recognizing her unconsciousness, he thought it a hopeful sign for him that she voluntarily remained. He drew nearer to her with a reawakened confidence. Her face looked very gentle as she gazed into what almost appeared to be the open gates of heaven; for a wonderful pomp was marshalling now about the cloud-wreathed summits of the distant peaks. He thought of the day when they had been together in the Barranca de Portillo; and it seemed to him as if, for the first time, the Carmela of the past was before him. But not in the Barranca—not under the great, spreading tree by the rushing river—had he ever felt the hesitation which beset him now; had his heart beat so obtrusively or his voice so faltered when he essayed to speak.

"I wish," he said at length, "that I could paint

you as you stand there, with that look of dazzled delight in your eyes."

As, with a start, she turned the eyes of which he spoke upon him, the look of delight went very swiftly out of them. She became aware for the first time of the absence of the rest of the party, and for an instant she had an idea of following them at once. But the situation was not of her making; and to retreat from it, as if she feared to remain, seemed undignified. So she answered, quietly:

"Is it possible that you can think of any other picture in the face of *this*?" And she motioned toward the vision of glory before them.

"Yes," he replied, quickly; "I could think—whether I would or not, I *must* think—of the picture which you make in the face of the greatest and fairest that earth can show. Ah, Carmela, if you would only believe this!"

"And if I did believe it, what then?" she asked. All the light and color appeared suddenly to fade from her countenance, as they would a little later from the snow-covered heights, leaving it white and still; and the dark eyes were, for once, proud instead of soft as they met his own. "What then?" she repeated. "What possible difference can it make to me in what manner you regard my poor face, which you once painted,

and then forgot more quickly than you had painted it?"

"Forgot!" he exclaimed. "No—I never forgot you. I was only weakly compliant to the will of others. I know and regret it now."

"Yes," she said, with an accent of delicate scorn, "now that the will has changed, you are as compliant in another manner. I am aware of that."

"You wrong me!" he cried, passionately. "You do me the greatest injustice! Why are you determined to think ill of me? Carmela, in those days to which I now look back, as a man might look back on a forfeited heaven, it seemed that you found some good in me. Is it not possible that you can ever again find any,—that you can ever again believe that there is anything in me worthy of your love?"

Something in the appealing humility of the question touched Carmela. "I have never doubted that there is much good in you—why should I?" she said, more gently. "But that I can ever find again what I found, or fancied I found, a year ago is not possible. I thought you understood this."

The softening of her tone gave him a hope which she did not intend. "Why is it not possible?" he asked, insistently. "Do you not believe in regret and atonement for wrong-doing, and

would you deny the possibility of this to me?"

"I would deny nothing to you," she answered, "except what concerns myself. I believe in your regret, and I accept as full atonement your expression of it; but beyond that there is no atonement in your power. Nor do I desire any. Do not force me to say more. Do not force me to repeat what I told you the other day, and which it was surely enough to have said once."

"But listen to me only for one moment," he entreated. "Carmela, this is life or death to me—I must speak! You were right in what you said the other day. The Arthur Lestrangle of last year was a pitiful egotist unworthy of you. But he has had some hard lessons since then, and they have taught him both your value and his own weakness. Is it not possible for you to trust him again? When I think of that day in the Barranca de Portillo—that day when we were so happy,—it seems impossible that you can cast the past out of your heart."

"And when I think of the day to which you allude," she said, in a tone that was almost stern, "I know that it would be as possible to bring back its vanished hours as to revive the feelings that filled it. You ask if it is not possible for me to trust again the man who betrayed the trust

I then gave him. I answer no! If I loved him I might perhaps forgive his weakness and his desertion—for love, it is said, forgives everything: but I do not love him. I have never loved him since I came to my senses and recognized what folly it had been to love one so—” She paused. It was not possible for her to strike cruelly, and she knew that her next words would have sounded cruel to the man who looked at her with such wistful eyes that her pity was again touched. “See,” she said, after a moment, “why do you persist in forcing me to say these things?—to recall what I would gladly forget?”

“But how if *I* can not forget?” he asked. “Carmela, it is strange—although you speak to me in this manner, and although I always thought that I could never endure to be repulsed by any woman, I love you far better than I did when we parted a year ago. I love you so well that I find it *impossible* to believe that there is no hope for me. Give me any probation you please, and see how eagerly I will accept it. There is not anything I will not do to win again your confidence and your love. I will even promise to become a Catholic.”

It was as a flash of inspiration that this idea came to him, and he uttered it with something almost like triumph; for surely this would prove

what he had desired to find—the brilliant stroke by means of which he might win again all that he had lost. But he was not prepared for the effect of the words on Carmela. She drew back and looked at him with large, startled eyes full of wonder—almost of horror.

“You cannot mean,” she said, “that you would be willing, without knowledge, without conviction, without faith, to become a Catholic simply to please me?”

“It is the strongest proof I can give of what I would do for you,” he answered. “I am willing to sacrifice even my freedom of thought in order that there may be no barrier between us that I can remove.”

“Ah,” she cried, as if the words were involuntarily wrung from her, “is it strange that you could not be true to a creature when you have no idea of truth toward God? You would play with the solemn mysteries of religion, and make them a means of gaining your end! Perhaps it seems to you a matter of indifference what faith one professes when one believes nothing. But to me such an idea is horrible. If you came to the door of the Church a true convert, no one would welcome you more gladly than I—though your conversion could have no personal interest to me; but to come in this manner, to make a lip-

deep profession in order to gain what I can never give you—I find no words strong enough to tell you what I think of that !”

“You have found them,” he said, with pale lips. “At least you have made me understand how futile any further words of mine are. I have offered you everything that a man values most—my devotion, my life, the homage of my heart and of my mind ; and you reject all. I have nothing more to offer—not even the prospect of a fortune, since my aunt intends to bestow the half of hers upon you.”

“Upon *me* !” She faced him with a quick movement of indignant pride. “It is impossible that the señora, your aunt, has any such intention,” she said, with a tone which would not have misbecome a princess.

“It is not only possible but certain, since she told me of it herself,” he answered. “You must allow me to congratulate you, and myself also, that your acquaintance with me has not been altogether productive of harm to you.”

“And allow me,” she replied, with an admirable dignity, to assure you that no part of your aunt’s fortune concerns, or ever will concern, me. I can imagine why, fancying perhaps that she has done me an injury, she may wish to give it to me. But she has done me no injury ; and I,

who have not the least claim upon her, shall certainly not accept any part of her fortune. Make your mind easy on this point. What you have always been led to believe would be yours, and what you held of far more value than your faith to me, shall never be lost to you through me. I promise you that, and I have never broken a promise—now I see Mrs. Thorpe. Shall we join her?”

“I am afraid,” Fenwick was meanwhile saying to Mrs. Thorpe, “that the scene yonder does not augur very well for me. I fancy Lestrangle has made his peace.”

Mrs. Thorpe did not answer for a moment. She was looking intently at the two who were advancing toward them in the wonderful evening light, which filled earth and heaven with its roseate glow. Then suddenly she turned her head and said in a low voice :

“You are mistaken, Mr. Fenwick. I know my nephew’s face well. He has put his fate to the touch—and lost.”

CHAPTER XXIX.

"SEÑORA mia," said Carmela, "do not think me obstinate or unkind, but it is necessary that I should return to Guadalajara to-morrow."

It was the day after the excursion to Chapultepec, and the two ladies found themselves alone together for the first time. Mrs. Thorpe smiled a little at the eager, anxious look on the girl's face.

"My dear," she said gravely, although there was a gleam of humor in her eyes, "if you insist upon returning to Guadalajara to-morrow, it will be necessary for you to leave Mexico to-night; and that would cause you to travel alone with Arthur—something which I fear Mexican custom does not permit, and which your mother certainly would not like."

"Oh!" exclaimed Carmela, catching her breath. "He is going to-night, then; and I—I am the cause! Ah, señora, there is yet time! Keep him and let me go."

"Why?" asked Mrs. Thorpe, coolly. "I told you once before that I did not send for him for my own amusement; for, in point of fact, he does

not amuse me at all. Therefore, why should I wish to keep him, since he tells me that he has no longer any reason for staying?"

"But it seems hard that I should be the cause of his going," murmured Carmela.

"Were you not the sole cause of his coming? And since he has failed to make good his case with you, what should he do but go? He tells me that you gave him no hope. Is he right in this?"

"Yes," the girl answered, in a low but firm voice. "It was not possible for me to give him any. Nothing can make the past live again, nor do I desire that it should do so. But it pains me to pain him, and more yet to pain *you*."

"If I am pained, I have only myself to blame," said the elder lady. "There is nothing about which you should trouble yourself less than my pain in this matter. And as for Arthur—well, he seems to feel it now more than I imagined he could feel anything; but his pain will not last long. Nothing does with him—pain least of all. So do not distress yourself about what is no fault of yours. As for your going home, we will return to Guadalajara in a few days, if you wish it."

"I did not wish it, except for this," Carmela answered. "It has been a great pleasure being

here, until—" She paused a moment, clasped her hands together as they lay in her lap, and went on with an effort: "There is another thing of which I must speak to you, Señora. It is difficult, but it must be done. Your nephew told me yesterday that you have an intention to give me some part of your fortune. What I wish to say to you is that this must not be. I thank you for the kindness of the thought, but it is not possible—you must not give any of your money to me."

"Arthur had no right to speak to you of what I told him," said Mrs. Thorpe, flushing angrily. "It was an inexcusable breach of confidence, and I cannot imagine what his object was in committing it."

"I think it escaped him involuntarily," said Carmela, generously, anxious to make no trouble. "He seemed to desire to let me know that he had done me no harm. I think," she added, with her lip curling a little, "that he thought, on the contrary, all that had passed was a benefit, since it led to such a result. But I told him that he was mistaken; and that, since I had no possible claim upon you, I should certainly decline to profit by your generosity. I hope that you will not misunderstand me when I tell you the same."

"I do not misunderstand you at all," replied Mrs. Thorpe. "You think that I wish to offer you some money to atone for having deprived you of Arthur. But you could not do me a greater injustice. My intentions, which relate altogether to the future—for I do not propose to give any one my fortune until I am done with it myself,—have no connection with anything which passed between Arthur and yourself. I do not believe that you think I did you an injury in separating you from him"—Carmela shook her head to signify that she did not,—“nor do I now believe it myself. These things are not altogether in our hands, and even our wrong acts are sometimes made to serve a good end. My conduct, which I cannot deny to have been very wrong, served a better end than I deserved or could have imagined; for by means of it I came to Mexico, I have known you and I have become a Catholic.”

“No, Señora,” said the girl, gently, “you mistake. It was not owing to any wrong act that that these things came to pass. You came to Mexico on a generous impulse, with a good intention—to endeavor to set right what you believed to have been a wrong. And God blessed that good intention, though in a different manner from what you had anticipated. He gave

you His faith. It was a great grace, and I thank Him with all my heart for it."

"After God, I owe it to you," returned Mrs. Thorpe. "Had you repulsed my advances—as you would certainly have been justified in doing—when I went to Guadalajara, I should never have seen and known what I saw and knew with you of the Catholic Church; and therefore it is not likely that I should ever have become a Catholic. It cost you an effort, no doubt, to accept my acquaintance; but I am sure you must feel that you are rewarded for it."

"More than rewarded," said Carmela, her eyes suffused with the moisture that springs from a heart deeply touched. "It is the greatest happiness I have ever known."

"Then," said the elder lady, "do not deny *me* a little happiness—that of thinking that I can put into your hands the means of doing much good. I desire to do this not only because I am attached to you—more attached than I can readily say,—but because I know you will use it well."

Carmela shook her head. "You honor me with your trust," she said; "but it is not possible for me to accept it. Use what is yours for good purposes while you live. That is best."

"Well, we will say no more about it now," an-

swered Mrs. Thorpe, anxious to waive the subject; for she was determined to do what she pleased. "At least, when we return to Guadalajara, you must let me help you with some of the charitable works in which you are so much interested."

"Oh, willingly!" cried the young girl, with shining eyes, falling readily into the trap. And so no more was said for that time of the vexed subject of the fortune.

But the news that Lestrangle was going that night—going, as she felt, not only out of Mexico, but out of her life forever—affected Carmela as something as sad as it was unavoidable. She had no regret for the decision which sent him away, but a mournful sense of the shortness and uncertainty of everything oppressed her; and, recalling the different manner in which she had regarded his departure—how it had seemed to tear her very heart asunder—only a year before, she felt a recurrence of the self-disgust which had prompted her words to Fenwick in the monastery of San Angel. "To put an unworthy object out of one's heart is not inconstancy," common sense said to her; but still the sad feeling of disillusion remained: the consciousness that she had given so freely, poured out so lavishly, a wealth of passionate affection upon a

dream, which she had now to cast aside. Everything in life seemed at this moment to have, as it were, a bitter taste—the taste of that knowledge which comes all too soon of the instability and incompleteness of all things earthly; of the piteous failures in human character, and the insecure foundations upon which our best hopes in life are built.

For such feelings there was but one remedy, and that Carmela from long habit was prompt to take. Accompanied by Mrs. Thorpe's maid, who, being a Catholic Irishwoman, was always glad to be summoned to go with the young lady on such visits, she went out to seek a church, where she could lay her heart, with all its sad thoughts, before the Tabernacle. In no part of the city of Mexico has one far to seek to find a church; but most of those which are not *parroquias* are closed after noon, so that it sometimes happens that it is necessary to walk some distance before finding one with open doors.

This was how Carmela found it on the present afternoon. Santa Brigida, to which she first turned her steps, had closed its gates; so, turning away from the noise and crowd of the Calle San Francisco, she passed through the beautiful green avenues of the Alameda, and came out on the quieter thoroughfares that lie beyond, in the

direction which the flying Spaniards took on the terrible *Noche Triste*—the dismal night when those who escaped from slaughter found their stout-hearted chief weeping bitter tears beneath the tree that, standing on the road to Tacuba, is known even unto to-day as “the Tree of the Noche Triste.” In this quarter of the city, as elsewhere, beautiful old churches abound; and Carmela soon found one, the open doors of which invited entrance. Long did she remain praying in its atmosphere of incomparable peace, until at last this peace entered into her heart. Her face had a different look when she rose from her knees, and, smiling at the maid, who sat on a bench near by, turned toward the door.

“I hope you did not grow cold. I am sorry to have kept you so long,” she said, in her soft tones, when they were once more on the street.

“Sure, miss, I was not tired at all, at all,” replied Margaret, earnestly. “I took shame to meself to be sitting on a bench while you was still on your blessed knees; but it’s killing those hard floors are to me poor knees, that haven’t been used to the likes of them. I’m thinking the people here are better Christians than we are at home,” she added, with a sad intonation.

“We have only a different way of showing our religion, I fancy,” said Carmela, with a smile.

"But it was very chilly in the church. We will sit down in the Alameda and warm ourselves."

So when they entered the beautiful pleasance again, Carmela selected seats on one of the picturesque stone benches that surround the *glorietas*, where, sitting half in sunshine, half in shadow, they had a charming scene before their eyes: the sweeping circle, with its sparkling fountain in the centre, round which children played gayly, and pedestrians passed on their way through the park; radiating avenues opening vistas of sun-flecked shade and depths of bowery greenness, of graceful foliage and blooming flowers in the gardens that lay between. Partly because it was so pleasant in the lovely, quiet spot, and partly because she dreaded what awaited her at the hotel, Carmela was in no haste to move; but, leaning back, watched absently the flickering shadows, and the children at play around the fountain, until she was aroused by an exclamation from Margaret.

"Why, yonder's Mr. Arthur!" she said. "Maybe it's you he's looking for, miss."

"Arthur!" repeated Carmela, involuntarily. She sat up quickly and glanced around. "It is not probable that he is looking for me," she said. "Perhaps he will not observe us."

But this hope was destined to disappointment. Arthur was certainly not looking for her, nor

had he the least expectation of seeing her, as his start when his glance suddenly fell on her amply proved. It was a mere chance that led his steps toward the two familiar figures, which, had he passed on the other side of the circle, he might easily have overlooked; but when he saw Carmela he stopped abruptly, and, lifting his hat, advanced toward her.

"This is a surprise," he said. "I did not know that you were out."

"I have not been out very long," she answered. "I went to church, and, returning, stopped here for a few minutes."

"Will you give a few more minutes to me?" he asked, sitting down on the seat beside her. "Do not be afraid!" he added quickly in Spanish, as he saw her change color, and a look of apprehension which she could not restrain come into her eyes. "I am done with making myself disagreeable to you. I only want to say a few words before we part, and I am glad to find an opportunity to do so. You will not refuse the last kindness I shall probably ever ask of you?"

"I certainly will not," she replied, with her customary gentle courtesy; "but I hope that, since it is perhaps the last time we may ever meet, you will say nothing to leave a painful memory behind."

"On the contrary, what I wish to do is to efface, if possible, some such memories. I wish to beg you to forgive and, if you can, forget all the pain and annoyance I have caused you. And I desire also to tell you that although I have had only disappointment and mortification as a result of coming here, my better self—for, believe me, I have a better self—does not regret it. I have learned some things which it was worth coming to learn. I have learned that egotism and weakness have been my worst enemies; and that what a man has once let slip, Fate (*you* would say God) is too sternly just to give back to him again. If I am in any respect a stronger and a better man hereafter, it will be because I have known you. I feel that, even while I suffer in the realization that I have hopelessly lost you. For what I caused *you* to suffer a year ago, I ask your pardon once more from my heart—"

She interrupted him here. "There is no need to speak of that," she said. "If there was anything to pardon, I have long since pardoned it. The fault was mine as well as yours. We were mistaken in each other, and we thought only of ourselves. On no such love can God's blessing rest; and without it, the end was certain. I see that now, and I have no blame for you."

"But I have blame for myself, and must have

as long as life lasts," he replied. "I played a selfish and cowardly part, for which you were right to despise me. But enough of this! What I chiefly wish to say relates to another matter. I could not sleep last night for thinking of the manner in which I forgot myself far enough to speak to you of my aunt's fortune. Carmela, can you be generous enough to forgive that?—can you believe that it was not I who spoke, but an evil spirit that possessed me and urged me to words that I now heartily regret?"

"Yes," she answered kindly, "I do believe it; and I will forget all that you said."

"Are you generous enough for *that*?" he asked. "It was what I wished to beg of you—to forget; to say nothing to my aunt, to allow her to act freely as she will."

Carmela shook her head. "That is impossible," she said. "Even if I had not already spoken of the matter to your aunt, it would be necessary for me to do so; for I cannot allow her to give me any part of her fortune. I have no claim upon it. She has other relatives to be considered beside yourself; and if she wishes to give a part of it to charitable purposes, she must do so directly. I must make her understand this; and, instead of having to pardon you for the information you gave me, I am indebted to you

for it. Had she carried out her intentions, a bequest which I could not accept would only have been an embarrassing trust, to be as soon as possible made over to the rightful heirs."

"But why should you look at the matter in that light?" he demanded. "She has a right to give her fortune to whom she pleases; she—"

Carmela's lifted hand stopped his words. "Say no more," she said, in a tone as decided as it was quiet. "It is useless. For your own sake, and for my recollection of you, I am glad that you have said so much. But it is not possible for you to change my resolution. It is no spirit of pride or of resentment that I repeat what I told you yesterday—that no part of Mrs. Thorpe's fortune will ever concern me."

"I am sorry," he answered, and his tone proved that the words were honestly uttered. "I should like to be able to feel that, even indirectly, I had brought some good into your life, and you make it impossible."

"Nay," she said—and he thought with a pang that never again could he hope to see such beautiful eyes as the soft and luminous ones which she turned upon him,—“if it will be any comfort to you, believe that you have brought much good into my life. You do not believe it? Then let me count it up for you. First there

were many golden days of happiness before I knew what was in my heart,—days when I learned much from you that had never entered my life before. Then came the suffering; but surely if there is anything for which we should be grateful it is for suffering, which teaches us something we could not else have learned. Only to-day I had still much to learn,—only to-day I felt sad and heart-sick in thinking of the past; and it all seemed to me without purpose or object. But I went to church, and there, as I prayed in the silence and the quiet, God seemed to speak to me, and showed me how nothing which He permits is without purpose or object. Out of the suffering I gained a knowledge and a strength I might never else have won; while to reward—to infinitely reward—me for whatever I had endured, God allowed me the great privilege of leading a soul toward His truth. And, adding up all these things, I thought to myself what I now tell you: that you have brought far more good than evil into my life; and I am glad to have an opportunity to tell you so before we part."

"Carmela, you are a saint!" he cried, overwhelmed by emotion, which there seemed no words possible to express. Had they been in a less public place he would have fallen on his

knees before her, to kiss the slender, ungloved hands that lay in her lap. As it was, he knew that he would never forget this moment: the lovely face so full of the light of perfect self-forgetfulness; the sound of the soft musical voice uttering words which were a revelation to him of that high spiritual alchemy, by means of which a noble soul transmutes even the base metal of evil into the pure gold of good.

"Oh, no," she answered, smiling a little at his words, "the farthest from it! But you must believe that I mean all that I have said; and if you ever think of me in the future, do not let it be as of some one whom you have injured—for if so, you would shrink from the recollection,—but of some one who has nothing with which to reproach you, and who will rejoice from her heart to hear of your happiness and prosperity."

"I left my best chance for happiness behind me in Mexico a year ago," he said. "*That* I can never regain; but at least it is something to have such kind words from you to take away with me. I shall hold all women higher henceforth, for having known you; and if ever—if ever, Carmela—I think of any religion, I promise that I will think first of the religion which I have seen bear such fair fruit in you. Now"—rising abruptly—"I will leave you, for this is our real farewell,

although of course I shall see and bid you good-bye to-night."

Without giving her time to reply, he walked away; and as Carmela watched his figure passing out of sight down one of the shade-arched vistas, she was conscious that her eyes were dimmed with tears, which had their spring in a source deeper than any personal feeling—the keen regret for another's pain, and the realization of a past, with all its hopes and errors absolutely and forever closed.

CHAPTER XXX.

IT cannot be denied that on the next day there was a certain sense of relief in every one's mind in the consciousness that Lestrangle had departed. Fenwick, in especial, made no attempt to conceal his pleasure in the fact. The sun seemed to him to shine with a new brightness, and the air to possess an elixir of delight it had not owned before, since his mind was relieved from a fear which he now knew had been very great. For he had never been able to really believe that Carmela would send away a man who in the past had held so powerful an influence over her heart ; and yet he had known well that if she married him she would bear for life a burden of disappointment and regret, and the keen suffering which the higher nature allied with the lower must ever know. That she had escaped this was matter for rejoicing, even if he himself profited nothing by the dismissal of the old lover.

And he had very little hope of profiting by it. Not a word or a look had ever escaped from Carmela which could give him hope. On the

contrary, he remembered well how often, before the coming of Lestrangle, he had felt himself chilled by the barrier of reserve she had interposed between them. Still, he said to himself resolutely, as he had said to Mrs. Thorpe, that he would make every effort in his power to win the one woman in the world who seemed to him best worth winning ; and that if she gave him even a shred of hope, he would cling to it as long as she would allow him to do so.

Filled with these thoughts, her presence when they met, the gentle friendliness of her manner and the soft kindness of her eyes, gave him a new and exquisite pleasure. "Now," said the young man, unconscious how much joyousness was in his voice, "what shall we do with ourselves to-day ! You see, I have my friend on my hands, and it is necessary to show him something. What shall it be ?"

"Guadalupe is by far the most interesting place near Mexico, and after Chapultepec, the most beautiful," observed Mrs. Thorpe. "Governor Rayburn will certainly wish to see that."

"He will when I explain it to him," said Fenwick. "I do not suppose that, up to the present time, he has ever heard of it. And you"—he spoke to her, but he looked at Carmela,—“you will accompany us if we go ?”

"With pleasure," she answered. "It is more than an excursion, it is a pilgrimage to go to Guadalupe; and neither Carmela nor myself would wish to leave Mexico without visiting the shrine again."

"Do you think of leaving Mexico soon?" he asked.

"In a few days perhaps. I am going back to Guadalajara for a short time, and then—well, then it will be necessary to think of home. Mexico has fascinated me so much that I positively feel averse to the thought of leaving it. If I could persuade Carmela, now, to go with me—"

"You are very kind, Señora," interposed Carmela; "but that is not possible."

"I, too, must soon be thinking of leaving this enchanted land for colder and more prosaic scenes," said Fenwick, with a sigh. "But meanwhile we will go again to Guadalupe, where we first met; and, if necessary to make a return to Mexico absolutely certain, drink yet more deeply of the water of the Holy Well."

"It is not necessary for me to drink of the Holy Well in order to be sure that I shall never forget Guadalupe, and that I shall certainly return if God gives me life," said Mrs. Thorpe, thinking of what had passed within herself upon the sacred hill.

And so Governor Rayburn was the only one of the party who had not at once the sense of a religious pilgrimage and of a farewell, as they journeyed out to Guadalupe. On this occasion they were admitted into the noble basilica, which, stately as it was before, is being rebuilt in yet more stately grandeur, to honor the great favor and enshrine the miraculous picture of the Mother of God. There will be few more beautiful churches in the world than this basilica of Guadalupe when finally completed; for Mexico will give her best genius and pour out her wealth to prove her grateful appreciation of the fact that, while Mary's feet have touched and hallowed many spots of earth beside this hill of Tepeyácac, here alone has she deigned to leave an enduring memorial of herself, imprinted upon the blanket of the humblest of the race, which, as Las Casas said, received the true religion with a readiness that no people in the world have ever surpassed, and hold it as faithfully to-day.

After leaving the basilica, the party passed through the pretty *plazuela*, which fronts the deserted Capuchin convent and its adjoining church, to the exquisite chapel that covers the Holy Well; and from there climbed the stairway which leads to the chapel upon the hill,

where Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe herself smiled down upon them.

Very earnest and fervent were the devotions of the Catholic members here ; but after they had concluded their prayers, and set up the immense wax candles which they left to burn at Our Lady's feet, Mrs. Thorpe turned her attention to the polite but non-committal gentleman with them. She explained to him all the details of the shrine and then, anxious that he should not omit any of the sights of the place, suggested that he be shown the curious grotto on the side of the hill, made by one of the servitors of the church, and ingeniously lined with a mosaic formed of bits of broken china-ware. As Carmela had no desire to visit this curiosity again, especially since it involved descending half of the steep way which led downward, she said that she would remain on the platform in front of the stone screen, where the stairways from the opposite sides of the hill meet, until their return.

Seated on the bench placed there, and absorbed in the beautiful scene outspread before her, she did not observe the lapse of time, until Fenwick's appearance, as he came up rather breathless from the ascent—which is much more difficult on the side of the grotto than on the other side,—surprised her. “Where are the

others?" she asked, as he sat down beside her.

"They have wisely decided to continue their walk downward," he answered, "rather than, like the King of France with twenty thousand men, climb up the hill, just to go down again on the other side. I am instructed to tell you to meet them in the *plazuela* in time for the next car. But that is not due for half an hour yet, so I may rest here and recruit my exhausted energies a little before we descend."

She smiled. "You seem in need of rest," she said; "and certainly here is a perfect place to take it. I think, after all, I like this view better than that of Chapultepec. It is not so extensive, but there seems to me something in it which the other has not. Perhaps it is the sanctuary charm, the sight of all these domes at one's feet, the thought of what has taken place on this spot. One feels so near heaven here!"

"Yes," he assented, gazing at the wide extent of plain, which melted into blue, misty distance before it reached the base of the majestic mountains; "it is indeed a heavenly place. I am glad," he added, "that it was here we met. There could be no better place to begin—anything."

She glanced at the spot where he had been standing on the day to which he alluded, when

she came around the screen with Mrs. Thorpe and saw him for the first time. It seemed very long since then. She turned her eyes from the imaginary stranger leaning against the parapet to the now familiar face at her side, and found its gaze directed upon her.

"I have been thinking," he said meditatively, "of the chances of life and the risks that one sometimes runs. It seemed such a mere chance, my coming here that day ; yet if I had not come we might never have met. I can hardly realize the thought of such a misfortune as that."

She smiled again, leaning back in her seat with an air of composure ; for there was something in Fenwick's companionship that always gave her a sense of ease, and that certainty of sympathetic comprehension which is one of the greatest and rarest pleasures of life.

"It would, at least, have been a misfortune of which you were unconscious," she remarked. "*We* should have been unconscious also, yet the misfortune would have been much greater for us than for you."

"You are exceedingly good to say so," he replied ; "but I don't see how you can possibly make that out."

"Do you not ?" she asked, with some surprise. "Yet it is very clear. Think of all that you have

done for us—how you have showed us so many things and places we could never have found alone; given us information, pleasure—”

“In short, been a tolerable guide,” he said, laughing a little. “Well, I am very glad to have been of use, and to have been able to add a little to your enjoyment; but, you see, almost any one of fair intelligence could have done as much as that for you, while the pleasure I have had in knowing *you* has been of an altogether different order. Nothing else could have taken its place.”

He added the last words as if to himself—dropping his voice a little over them,—and so Carmela did not answer. But the expression of reserve, of drawing back within herself, which he had seen come over her face on one or two occasions, when he had spoken somewhat like this, did not now appear. He drew an augury of encouragement, and after a moment went on:

“I have feared of late that this rare and exquisite pleasure was over for me, and therefore I cannot refrain from speaking of the happiness which it is to me to find myself here with you to-day, without—any disturbing influences.”

A flush came to her cheek, but she answered with her usual simplicity of voice and manner: “Yes, it is pleasant. And yet one feels sad and

ashamed to think of people who are gone as disturbing influences."

"Not I," said Fenwick, with decision. "I feel neither sad nor ashamed to recognize a fact. And you must forgive me if I say that I am glad to see that you are looking happier than on the day we were alone together last at San Angel."

"It is true," she said, meeting his gaze with her clear, frank eyes. "I am happier now than then. I felt that day a disgust with myself as well as with—others. I had been forced to face a past from the thought of which I shrank, and I had found that there was nothing in it—absolutely nothing—worth regret. That is a terrible revelation. One despises one's self more than one despises—but I forget, in speaking like this, that you do not understand me."

"I understand you well," he answered. "It is not my fault that I know all the history of the past to which you allude. Mrs. Thorpe told me, because she divined how deep my interest in it was. She knew that what I desired above all things was to win your heart. She told me, therefore, how Arthur Lestrangle had once won and lost it, and how he had come to try and win it again."

The flush on Carmela's cheek deepened for a moment, and then faded away, leaving her very

pale, and her eyes grew large with startled surprise as she gazed at him. His perfect quietness of tone and manner made his words even more astonishing than they would otherwise have been ; although under any circumstances they would have been astonishing enough ; for she had never thought of him as a possible lover, and it had been instinct rather than reflection that had made her draw back whenever his interest had seemed to transgress a certain bound.

"Have I startled you?" he asked gently, meeting her dilated, inquiring gaze. "Perhaps you think I have no right to speak in this manner. That I grant freely—I have no right at all, unless loving you with all my heart constitutes such a right."

She put out her hand with the quick gesture of one who refuses an offered gift. "No, no!" she said. "It is impossible. I cannot think of *that* again! I have lost faith in all human love; and, most of all, I have lost faith in myself. You must not give your heart to me—"

"It is too late to tell me that," he said, calmly. "It is already given with a completeness that leaves nothing to be added. And the task that lies before me now is to win yours, Carmela,—to prove to you that all men are not like the man who has gone away, and to win you back

to faith in yourself and in the possibilities of life."

"That is too hard a task," she answered, in a low voice. "Believe me, it is best that you do not attempt it."

"There is nothing on earth better worth attempting," he said, "even if I fail. But I shall hope not to fail; for I believe that your happiness is at stake as well as my own. I may be presumptuous, but I think that I understand you sufficiently to make you happy. You can never know how much, how unselfishly, I have trembled for you during the last few days. I knew well that the man who had once fascinated your inexperience would have no power to satisfy the true needs and capabilities of your nature; yet I also knew that the glamour of the past was over him, and—"

"No," she interrupted, "there was no glamour over him in my eyes. I saw him as he was so clearly—so clearly even at the first moment I looked at him—that I had only wonder for my own past infatuation. And it was that which saddened and disgusted me most,—that one can be the victim of such delusions. I seemed to have a glimpse of the poor foundations on which all that we call love rests."

"Not all," said Fenwick. "There is a love

which, resting on a noble foundation, not only blesses one's life in time, but is worthy of being carried from time into eternity. Do not confound things so essentially different as constancy to a worthy passion and obstinate clinging to an unworthy one. Only fools are constant to the last. Time, thought, prayer, his own conduct, helped you to read this man clearly when you met him again after long absence. Thank God that these things came in time to save you from uniting your life to his. For that would have been a great and terrible mistake."

She shuddered slightly. "Yes," she said, "it would have been no less than that. I see it now, and I *do* thank God; yet I also feel humiliated by the thought of all that I suffered for one so unworthy."

"It would have been too much to expect that you should have known then that he was unworthy. That knowledge had to come through suffering and with time. But now—now that he has gone out of your life forever, do not let his shadow stand between you and the belief in a love that shall have a better foundation. That would be to give to the past a new and most terrible importance. Carmela, in saying this I am pleading for your life as well as for myself. If you could only give your heart to me, I would

value it so highly, cherish it so tenderly—ah, how vain are words!” He broke off suddenly with a note of passion in his voice that had not been there before. “Unless your heart speaks for me how can I hope that you will trust me even enough to test the devotion I offer you!” he said, rising abruptly and walking to the parapet, where he had stood on the day of which Carmela had been thinking so short a time before.

She watched him for a moment, as he stood with his back to her; and then, rising also, walked to his side.

“Listen to me, Señor,” she said, in the soft liquid tones he had come to love so well; “and believe all that I tell you, for I shall speak to you as frankly and sincerely as I think. It is not necessary for me to test anything which you offer. It was knowing you that helped me to see what Arthur Lestrangle was. When what is true is placed beside what is false, one must be poor indeed one’s self if one cannot judge the one by the other. I had always distrusted him somewhat—even in the midst of my infatuation, though I would not acknowledge it to myself; but it was not until I learned how a different nature could inspire trust that I knew how much had been lacking in all that I felt for him. Of *you* I have not the least doubt. I feel here—” she placed her

hand on her heart—"the great value of all that you give me; but—what can I say? I have nothing of value to give you in return. Love has been made so bitter to me that I shrink even from the name. And yet—and yet—I should grieve were I never to see you again!"

Her voice fell over the last words in a cadence that was almost a sob. Fenwick turned quickly and met her eyes, tender, wistful, entreating she knew not what. But he knew. In this moment, so critical for them both, when a duller man might have blundered so fatally, a flash of insight came to him like a revelation; and he saw that her heart was his, though she was not yet able to read its riddle. It was as she said—love had been made too bitter to her for her to turn readily for another draught from the enchanting waters. Time was necessary,—time for the taste of disillusion to pass away, for the sting of humiliation to be forgotten, for trust and confidence to grow from the sympathy in which they were planted, and form a guard of honor round the temple where Love should once more enter and reign supreme.

It spoke well for Fenwick—for the delicacy of his perceptions and the unselfishness of his emotions—that he saw all of this; and, seeing, acted with a kindness and consideration which

touched Carmela more than any protestations of passion could have done.

"If that is so," he said, answering her last words, "I promise that you shall see me often until the day comes—if it ever does—when you tell me that you wish to see me no more. But I have little fear of the coming of that day, or else I should go now. In the future we will talk again of love, but for the present I will speak of it no more. You can trust me for that."

"Have I not said that I trust you for everything?" she answered. A smile came into her eyes and touched her lips. The whole aspect of the future seemed changed by the assurance that she should see him often. She suddenly held out her hand. "Come," she said, "let us go into the chapel and thank Our Lady for all that began here upon Her hill."

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